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# *PERPLEXITY.*

BY

SYDNEY MOSTYN.

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'Beloved! if I wander far and oft  
From that which I believe, and feel, and know,  
Thou wilt forgive . . .  
Knowing that I, though often blind and false  
To those I love, and O, more false than all  
Unto myself, have been most true to thee.'

J. R. LOWELL.

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*VOL. II.*



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# *PERPLEXITY.*

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## CHAPTER I.

I HAD been a week now at Huddleston. I had received no letter from Mrs. Gregory, and the only chance left for me was to advertise. I had finished my breakfast: I had watched, with aching sight, the postman pass down the street, knocking, it seemed, at every door but mine. Now I rose, took a sheet of paper, a pen and ink, and tried to make out an advertisement. I was strangely abstracted; I could not fix my attention upon the task. I had commenced:—

‘A young lady of good birth and——’



and had got no further. The ink that marked this line soon dried ; with my forehead supported on my hand I leant over the paper, still clutching the pen, my eyes fixed on the scrap of writing, but with my thoughts far away ; away with that stout-hearted tender old man who lay sleeping under the shadow of the church at Hunton ; away in the years long dead, but revived now by memory, bringing their old joys, their old calm, their old dreams before me, like a rippling tide strewing a shore with the fragments of the gay bark it has wrecked in the darkness. Hot large drops clouded my eyes, and stained the paper ; I sobbed with cruel convulsive efforts that seemed to strangle me.

As I sat deep in thought there suddenly fell upon the hall-door a quick, a pealing summons. I started, rose, approached the window, and tried to catch a glimpse of the visitor. He was a stranger—that I could see, of an outline wholly unfamiliar to me. It is one of Mrs. Shaw's old lodgers, I thought ; more probably it

is some one who has knocked by mistake. I threw myself into an armchair. Mrs. Shaw came upstairs; expectation and hope were in the good-natured thing's tread. The hall-door was opened, and I heard a frank, manly voice enquire,

‘Does Miss Kate Howard live here?’

You may conceive my consternation? Was this a trap laid by John Graham? Was this one of the paid emissaries which I sometimes fancied he would employ to find me out? My first impulse was to run to the door and tell Mrs. Shaw to deny me—an Irish impulse with a vengeance under the circumstances. But I had hardly time to rise before the door was opened, and—

‘A gentleman would like to see you, please, miss,’ said Mrs. Shaw.

She extended a card; I took it and read the name ‘Dr. Frank Monck.’

Monck? Monck? I said to myself, pondering. The name was wholly unfamiliar.

‘It must be a mistake, Mrs. Shaw,’ I said.

‘Shall I show him in, miss?’ asked Mrs. Shaw, practically.

‘Yes; you had better,’ said I.

A young man, fair-complexioned, with small light whiskers, a calm, clear, steel-gray eye, dressed in a frock coat fitting his supple form to perfection, entered the room. I started when I saw him. That handsome nose, that clear-cut, pleasant mouth, those serene eyes, were familiar to me; familiar, too, that ivory brow and glossy hair of rich chestnut. Yet where I had met them I could not divine. Returning his graceful bow, I motioned him to a seat.

‘I must apologise for this intrusion, Miss Howard,’ he said, with perfect ease of manner, and in an unaffected, cordial voice that won me over to like him at once; ‘I have called in the hope of being useful to you. I was at Mrs. Gregory’s office the other day when you entered, and was the unintentional listener of the conversation you held with that excellent person.’

Of course! It was at Mrs. Gregory’s that I had met him. He was the gentleman whose

speculative gaze I had been so anxious to escape.

‘ You expressed yourself anxious to procure a situation as governess,’ he went on. ‘ You told her that you were a stranger here, and you solicited her assistance. I was not sure that she could help you, but as she had volunteered to do so, I thought it best to give her time to perform her promises. My fear of being misapprehended, my dislike of intruding upon strangers, made me wish that your end should be effected by her instrumentality rather than by mine ; but in calling on her two or three days ago she informed me that she had no hope of procuring you a place. As I have some friends I professionally attend who are on the look out for a governess, I thought I would take the liberty of giving you their address. I might indeed have instructed Mrs. Gregory to act for me in this matter, but I am afraid she is a bit of a bungler ; she might neglect to lay before you certain deterrent conditions annexed to the opportunity ; and before I spoke to my

friends on the subject I thought it best to acquaint you with such details as might help you to form an opinion. This I believed could only be done by a personal interview.'

I murmured my thanks in a choking voice ; he could never have heard what I said ; but he must have seen my meaning in the grateful eyes I raised to his face.

'A gentleman and his wife named Fairborn some time ago desired me, should I hear of a governess, to let them know. They have two little girls ; they are healthy children, and therefore I am inclined to think not likely to be very peevish or troublesome.'

'I am extremely anxious to procure a situation,' I now ventured to say.

'I will write you their address ; and it will give me great happiness to mention your name to them. But—may I ask if you have filled the situation of governess before?'

'No.'

'You have no notion of the life, then?'

'I hardly wish to have any notion,' I an-

swered. 'It is sure to be hard and bitter enough, and I don't wish to aggravate my natural dread by fancy. If I were fit for any other occupation I would gladly turn to it. I must get a living somehow.'

I met his calm eyes; they exhibited no trace of inquisitiveness.

'Mr. and Mrs. Fairborn,' he said, 'are a little inclined to be disciplinarians. He is punctiliously religious; she is cold and exacting. I am not sure that you will be happy with them: but it is only the first step that costs; and if you could accommodate yourself for a short time to their habits, you might find an opportunity of procuring something more advantageous later on.'

'I feel deeply grateful to you for your advice and offer of assistance,' I said, much moved.

'Pray believe yourself under no obligation. No thanks are due. Indeed, the Fairborns may make you dislike me for having introduced you to them. Besides, you must recollect your claims. You pronounced yourself friendless;

by that simple assertion you make it incumbent upon every gentleman to become your friend. It gives me real pleasure to be of use to you; and I only trust my wish to help may avail.'

He rose, approached the table, and wrote some words on the piece of paper that held my fragment of advertisement. He handed me the paper, and I read :

'Charles Fairborn, Esq., The Abbey, Lechmere Road.'

'I shall have occasion to call upon them to-day,' he said, 'and I will take care to mention your name. They shall arrange an appointment, and if you will permit me I will drop you a line, stating at what hour you can see them.'

He left me nothing to reply but to thank him. He took his hat, and as he smoothed it lightly against his sleeve, asked,

'I presume, Miss Howard, I may mention that you can furnish them with satisfactory references? I am obliged to speak of this, for Mrs. Fairborn is, I am afraid, a particular

woman, as that rather objectionable species is termed.'

It struck me now for the first time that I should be called upon to give a reference. I had none to offer. I looked at him blankly.

'I have no references to give,' I said.

'That is unfortunate,' he exclaimed, placing his hat again on the table. 'Have you no friends? Is there no one where you come from who would write a line in reply to the questions that might be asked?'

It was dreadfully awkward to have to confess the truth, for I could hardly tell what inference he might draw; but there was no help for it.

'No one,' I answered.

He seemed really concerned.

'Not the doctor—not the clergyman?' he suggested.

'I will speak the truth, Dr. Monck,' I said; 'I have run away from home: from a home hateful as a charnel-house, in which I would have died had I remained, cruelly tyrannised over, cruelly, mercilessly treated. Were I to



give the faintest indication of my whereabouts I should be pursued ; and I think—I am sure—I should kill myself rather than go back. I *have* friends to whom I could refer, but I dare not trust them.'

He looked at me anxiously, and an expression of pity, cloud-like, swept across the gray calm of his eyes. There was a short pause. He said :

' I will do my best for you, Miss Howard ; I will urge everything I can on your behalf, and try to persuade them at all events to give you a trial. I will acquaint you by letter with the result to-morrow morning.'

He bowed to me, and was about to retire, when I went forward and frankly held out my hand.

' I find it very difficult to tell you how deeply I feel your kindness,' I said. ' I am all the more touched by it because lately I have met with little kindness. I am alone now in the world—and—and it is only people like myself who—have no friends—who can appreciate a——'

I stammered, struggled to master myself, turned my head, and, fairly broken down, burst into tears. I felt his hand press mine; the scalding tears burnt and blinded me; when I looked up he was gone.

After awhile I began to think over this incident. Had I known more of the world in those days I suppose the question that would have shaped itself to my mind would have been: 'When a gentleman calls upon a friendless and strange girl, is not the avowed errand on which he comes very often a mask to disguise intentions which may not be perhaps entirely philanthropic?' Primed with ball-room lore, hugely wise through conversations with smart and knowing companions, I should have probably known what to think and what to suspect. Happily I was not wise enough to be foolish; I was not clever enough to be sceptical. No doubt disturbed my belief in Dr. Monck's mission being what he professed it. I can thank God now that there was no officious tongue by me to inspire disbelief; by vexing my soul with

suspicions, by chilling my heart with incredulity, to make me wrong him by the shadow of a thought.

As he had promised, a letter from him reached me next morning. The envelope was sealed with a crest—a figure with one hand resting on a dog, the other in the act of hurling a javelin. The letter was haunted by a strange, vague perfume, soft, like that which hangs about a woman's hair. The handwriting was vigorous, dashing, and manly; it was essentially an educated hand—it was the hand of a gentleman. Thus ran its contents:

‘The Elms, Connaught Road, Huddleston.

‘Dr. Monck presents his compliments to Miss Howard and has great pleasure in informing her that he has seen Mr. and Mrs. Fairborn relative to the subject discussed this morning, and that they have expressed a wish for an interview. Will Miss Howard kindly call on Mrs. Fairborn to-morrow afternoon, at any time between three and five o'clock?’

This letter filled me with joy—such joy as fills the heart of the shipwrecked wretch when from the frail raft he suddenly descries land or a sail. Hope shook her wings, and prepared herself for a high flight. I read the letter again and again, pacing about the room in a great state of excitement, and occasionally stealing gratified peeps at the glass, for the letter had brought life to my cheeks and lustre to my eyes; the wan vision the mirror usually presented began to look vital again; the sadness was temporarily displaced, and something like the girlishness which belonged to it in my father's days was returning to it.

‘Well, Mrs. Shaw,’ I exclaimed, as she entered, ‘there is a prospect of my having good news to tell you at last.’

‘Indeed, miss!’ she exclaimed, in her quiet way; ‘I’m very glad to hear it.’

‘Have you ever heard of a family named Fairborn, living in the Lechmere Road?’

She shook her head. ‘But I’ve heard something of Dr. Monck, miss,’ she said.

‘What?’ I asked.

‘Mrs. Trundle was tellin’ me last night when we was talkin’ over this, that, and the other, that he attended her when she was lodged i’ th’ Infirmary for a broken leg. She says as everybody that knows him loves him and wussshups the ground he walks on; he’s so good and kind.’

‘I can believe it,’ I answered.

‘His mother’s rather stiffish and haughty, Mrs. Trundle says,’ she continued. ‘You see Mrs. Trundle knows a good deal about ’em, for she lives in a little house hard by th’ Elms, an’ the gossips are allers a chatterin’ about ’em. They come of a good stock. The doctor’s father was a general i’ th’ army—a titled gentleman he was—a knight, I think they call it. He was a good man too in his day, Mrs. Trundle says; but he’s been dead and gone these eight years now. My lady ain’t much liked; she’s too stiff with those beneath her—stiffer nor most of the quality as lives in bigger houses; but I must say, with Mrs. Trundle, that there ain’t

many in England who can boast of being of older stock nor my lady.'

'I should say that the society here consists chiefly of wealthy tradespeople?'

'Yes, miss; of manufacktories and the like. Dr. Monck's very good to the poor, Mrs. Trundle says. Every Christmas he spends forty pounds in necessities for the poor creatures—flannel, and groceries an' so. My lady calls it extravagance; but he don't mind her, says Mrs. Trundle.'

'Mrs. Trundle seems a very useful person to know,' I said, with a smile. 'Has she lived here long?'

'Forty year, miss, come and gone.' Then, with a little hesitation, 'You see she's got to know a good deal of the Moncks by washin' for 'em. She's a washerwoman.'

'Oh.'

'She picks up a good bit o' gossip in the kitchens. The servants is allers willin' to tell tales. They're proud, I suppose, o' their superior discernin'. I think it a bad habit. I've heard

of a good deal o' mischief flowin' from it. I doubt if there'd be so many divorces if there warn't always some cook or housemaid as had been wastin' her time in lookin' through a key-hole instead o' mindin' her work.'

'Well,' I said, 'if you should see Mrs. Trundle again, you might ask her if she knows the Fairborns. There is no reason why I should have any curiosity about them; for they haven't engaged me yet. But if they should engage me, I suppose it is as well to know as much as one can about the people one serves.'

'If there's anybody i' this place as is likely to know 'em, it's Mrs. Trundle,' going to the door and balancing it with the handle as she spoke. 'Lord! what a knack some women has of findin' out things! Mrs. Trundle's a good soul; but she's the most pryin' woman as ever had eyes to see with. Would you believe it, miss? There was a little old woman as used to puzzle her awful, livin' ten doors down th' Connaught Road. She was an odd pinch o' a body, with a bad squint, and always wore pink

heels to her shoes, and a red scarf over her poke bonnet to keep it on her head. Well, she was a mystifyin' woman, keepin' no servant, so that Mrs. Trundle couldn't get to find anythink about her—not even from the tradespeople, for she did her shoppin' herself in a little basket. The poor thing was ill and couldn't sleep o' nights, and that was just the cause, and nothink more; but Mrs. Trundle could never make out what she did with a light in her room all night, and her shadder passin' to an' fro the window, like a ghost on guard. Jim Trundle—that's Mrs. Trundle's Jim—told his mother that the little old thing's light was wisible to him every time he passed the house—he's a constable, is Jim—an' this set Mrs. Trundle a gapin' to know what it meant. What do you think she does? There's a cherry-tree standin' i' th' old woman's garden a-frontin' the house. Well, Mrs. Trundle takes a ladder one night, mounts the cherry-tree, and sits like a fowl i' th' blossoms, a-watchin' the window. She's a fat woman, an' the mercy is she didn't



fall, let alone the wonder of her havin' got up. Well, the blind was drawn, and she sees nothing ; but she sets there a-watchin' near an hour. When she tries to get down she declared to me she was that stiff that she couldn't hardly use her legs an' arms. Well, down she gets at last, takes to her bed, an' lies there a fortnight wi' spasms an' inflammation. You'd ha' thought *that* would ha' cured her o' pryin'. Not it. I could tell you some queer stories of her ; but you'll be wanting your dinner.'


Away she went. I was not sorry. Of Dr. Monck and the Fairborns I should have been glad to have heard as much as she had to tell ; but I really didn't take much interest in Mrs. Trundle.

## CHAPTER II.

WHEN good cockneys die, they will be permitted to build in the other world, I should say, such houses to live in as the Abbey. Only a man whose notions of life had been got by looking at the world through the slit in the till would select such a house for occupation. First imagine a flint wall, of about the heighth of a middle-sized man, running a long triangular race around a tolerably naked area of some seven or eight acres. The portion of this wall fronting the road is divided by a double gate of iron, gilt at the lower bars, and with gilt spear-heads, swung to two solid heights of masonry, each surmounted by a queer effigy—an eagle like a Titanic parrot, a lion like an ass

suffering from a violent eruption of hair about the neck.

Gazing through these barred gates, you see an oval plot of grass, rendered valueless as a lawn by reason of a large fountain-basin in the centre. This fountain consists of two naked boys staring upwards and blowing water from their mouths at the sky. The distension of their cheeks is dismaying; their attitude insupportable. Pale gravel walks take you past beds looking fresh dug, in which flowers, looking fresh planted, pain the eye with an overgrowth of incongruous colours. The flint wall, hemming the place in on all sides, gives the property a perfect asylum air. Two towers, resembling improperly-constructed chimneys, domineer over each wing. Where the hall door is entered, the building projects; where the conservatory stands, the building recedes. Nothing more hideous was ever erected. No tree hides its naked deformity; efforts have indeed been made to trail some Virginia creepers; but they resemble sickly, shapeless weed, pulled out of form and




life, and nailed in tight, dead torture against the wall.

I halted at the gilt gate, inspecting this ugly pile of red bricks, and musing on the execrable taste it exhibited, before I pulled the griffin's head which represented the bell-handle. No face was to be seen at any of the windows; no gardener worked in the grounds. I ran my eye over the dull red glare of brick; for the afternoon sun was blazing on the red-curtained windows, blazing on the red towers, and the red rain-pipes, and the red chimney-pots; but could discern no indication of human life. I had been nervous enough as I came along, but the sight of this staring red house and treeless garden, in which red flowers decidedly predominated, set me really trembling. I should have plucked up heart probably before some quiet building, no matter of what size.

In searching for the Lechmere Road I had come across such a house as I should not much fear to have entered: a house white and low, standing cool and clouded in the waving green-

ness of tall trees luxuriously clad; with burnished windows draped in white, fronted by grounds rich in a neglected growth of daisied grass, and darkened and sweetened by clustering apple, and cherry, and pear-trees, bending languidly to their weight of crimson, and green, and black. This house was designated 'The Elms,' probably from the row of trees that sentinelled the wall on the roadway; and I had surveyed it with interest as the home of Dr. Monck, whose name was inscribed in small characters on a little brass plate at the corner of the gate.

I mustered up courage to give the griffin a wrench; the loud, sonorous response of a bell, that continued clanging so long that it made me afraid I had pulled impertinently hard considering my business, was the consequence. Soon the square brown door, studded with nails (a barbarism often perpetrated by thoroughbred suburban), opened; a man with limp legs and a white neckcloth, in shoes showing his stockings, and with toes turned out, presented himself, surveyed me complacently with his hands



behind him, and then leisurely advanced to the gate. This he opened.

‘Are you the governess?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Please step this way, then.’

Instead of leading me to the front door, he conducted me to a side entrance, at which I learned the visits of the tradespeople and the friends of the servants were received. He turned the handle, led me through a narrow corridor smelling strongly of warm varnish, through the entrance hall, and into a large room. Here he left me. I trod upon a thick carpet, and sank, not without uneasiness, upon a gilt-legged red satin chair. Red! yes, the furniture of this room was red or rose-pink; pink, red, and white: such was the combination. A carpet of red velvet-pile, heavy red drapery in the windows, rose satin for the chairs and couches, red damask of a costly kind for the table-cloth, and white wall with running pink borders, white statuettes, jars, vases, ornaments, in marble, or stone, or composition, wherever

room could be found for them. The furniture of the mantelpiece was very magnificent. I think I never saw such a clock ; such a confusion of gilt and decorations, and wreathings and writhings of carving. The *coup-d'œil* of the room suggested opulence, and taste more unpardonably bad than the dress of a London Jewess at Margate.

Twenty minutes elapsed and nobody seemed aware of my presence. Had the footman neglected to announce me? It was probable ; he had an impudent face, and might wish to mark the sense of his own importance by letting it be known in the kitchen how little he valued the governess. With my back turned to the door, I was pondering the advisability of ringing the bell, when a very faint cough caused me to start. I looked around. A lady handsomely dressed in black moiré antique, with a thick gold chain around her neck, sat, with her eyes fixed upon me, in an armchair. I half rose, somewhat confounded at her unexpected pre-

sence, and in no small degree annoyed at the soundlessness of her entry.

‘Sit still,’ she said. ‘You are Miss Howard, are you not?’

‘I am,’ I answered.

‘My friend Dr. Monck has mentioned your name to me. He has told me exactly the circumstance of his introduction to you; and, it is perhaps right I should tell you, recommended your name to me by affirming the very favourable impression you had left on him.’

I inclined my head. Whilst she spoke I examined her. Silver-gray lines streaked her black hair, braided and descending in loops under her ear; she showed conspicuously two front teeth through lips at the extremities carved clear and meeting in a hairlike line. Her eyes were light; an expression, I know not of what, almost illusive by its exceeding vagueness, filled and faded in them, reminding me of silver fish darting through clouded water. I noticed her two lines of eyebrows prohibiting all expression




by their sharpness as though graven on the brow, and her thin, long, placid hands, illuminated by a number of rings.

‘There is no class more numerous than the governess class,’ she continued, in a voice hard, clear, and inflexible; ‘and yet to procure a good governess is the most difficult thing in the world. In one year I have changed no less than three persons. The first was an Irish-woman—I hope you are not Irish?’

‘No; I am English.’

‘The first was an Irishwoman, gifted with the brogue and the qualities that appertain to the brogue. She was rather ladylike and highly educated, but she stole my husband’s mareschino, and breathed upon the schoolroom air as pestilential a smell of spirits as ever I smelt. Of course I discharged her. My next governess was a woman who told us she was French by birth. She was so very poor that it was painful to see her wardrobe; and the first day she ate so ravenously that it made us all feel quite uncomfortable. My husband objected



to her on the grounds of her extreme indigence; such poverty, he was of opinion, was subjected to more temptations than the human race is capable of resisting. His objections were justified; before long we discovered that the character she had brought with her was forged. We tried a third governess. She brought good testimonials with her; but had a temper so ungovernable that I have often considered it a mercy she did not murder my children outright. Are you good-tempered?’

‘I believe I am.’

‘What are your qualifications?’

I enumerated them.

‘You have never been out as governess before?’

‘Never.’

‘Why should you think you are competent to undertake the duties of governess?’

I reflected before I answered. I perceived that much would depend upon my *way* of replying to her questions; much more than on the replies themselves. She sat sleek and still,

coldly awaiting my response. My answer came at last :

‘I am fond of children. I am not so old as to be incapacitated from thoroughly sympathising with them. I have patience ; I am capable of growing warmly attached to associations even though they be not of the sweetest. From an educated standpoint my knowledge, I am aware, is superficial ; but less than what I have could be imparted with great advantage to children.’

‘No doubt.’ She rose and touched the bell. Not a word was spoken until the footman entered. ‘Tell the young ladies to come here.’ The footman vanished, and she accosted me :

‘Dr. Monck tells me you can furnish no references.’

‘I regret that I cannot,’ I answered.

‘Why have you left your friends?’ she enquired.

I raised my eyes and looked her steadily in the face.

‘My past is my own,’ I said in as quiet but firm a voice as I could command ; ‘my present

and my future, if you suffer me to dedicate them to your children, are at your disposal to examine with what curiosity you like.'

'The answer is fair and the question is fair,' said a voice.

I turned : a tall man stood near me. Had I been told he had dropped from the ceiling or risen from the floor, I should have believed it. I must of course believe he had come in through the door—probably when, with averted face and downcast eye, I had been pondering a reply to a preceding question—but so noiselessly, so furtively, that no creak of the handle had heralded, no sound of footfall had announced him. The couple might really have been rehearsing for the next world, so ghost-like were they in their movements.

The tall man wore an eye-glass ; he was bald-headed, with a pinkish line of whiskers near the ear, a face of the complexion of veal considerably underdone, large eyes, and a wide mouth with a blubbery under lip. He wore high shirt-collars, a very large white cloth, and

was dressed in new black. Having spoken, he stepped noiselessly round to his wife, and, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, eyed me continuously and embarrassingly through his glass.

‘If the past of those you are designing to employ be of no interest to you, of what use are references?’ asked Mrs. Fairborn with cold complacency.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Fairborn (such was the tall man) rather nasally, enunciating his words in a drawling monotone; ‘I did not say that the past of anybody we were likely to employ was of no interest to us. If you reflect, you will find I merely commended her answer to your question.’

‘To my question what is your reply?’ asked Mrs. Fairborn of me.

‘You asked me, madam, why I left my friends?’

‘I did.’

‘My answer must be brief: I was unhappy.’

‘In what sense were you unhappy?’ asked Mr. Fairborn, who never removed his eyes from my face.

‘In so many senses, sir, that it would be useless my attempting to enumerate them.’ Then addressing Mrs. Fairborn, ‘My past is pure and unstained. I am prevented from giving you a reference by a rooted determination to supply my friends with no clue to my whereabouts. I appreciate your curiosity and lament that I am unable to gratify it. Dr. Monck led me to hope that you might be induced to take me on trial; should you deem this advisable you will have no reason to regret your confidence. The very generosity, indeed, such trust would imply would make me all the more anxious to win your approval.’

Mr. Fairborn stooped and said in a loud undertone:

‘She’s ladylike. She’d make a good example.’

Mrs. Fairborn was about to address me when the door opened and two children entered:

two very plain little girls, respectively seven and nine, as I afterwards ascertained, dressed in short frocks, with their hair distorted in curls all over their heads. They advanced to their mother and posed themselves on either side of her, staring at me with eyes which would have looked absurdly intent even at a pantomime or in the Zoological Gardens. The tall form of Mr. Fairborn in the rear completed the amiable family group.

‘These are my two little girls,’ said Mrs. Fairborn. Eight pairs of eyes were now upon me.

‘Bessie, the little girl to the left,’ said the monotone of Mr. Fairborn, ‘is of the two the more advanced; though of the two she is the younger. Rehearse your capacities to the lady, Bessie.’

Bessie, thus appealed to in terms I wondered she could understand, burst out at once with perplexing quickness :

‘I know the first and third Psalms by heart; I have read the Old Testament to Leviticus and the New Testament as far as the Gospel ac-

according to St. John ; I am in multiplication ; I know syntax ; I can write from dictation, and have passed the French verbs.'

The head in the air nodded approvingly, and then the monotone exclaimed :

'Let Charlotte recite her attainments.'

Charlotte was more shy ; she had to think, too, a little before she spoke. Her Biblical knowledge was as extensive as her sister's, but her knowledge of arithmetic was limited to addition ; she professed herself incapable of following dictation ; whilst in French her mother feared that she was a hopeless dunce. Meanwhile, please remember, the family had remained watching me as though I was taking their photographs.

'Do you think yourself competent to advance these children ?' asked Mrs. Fairborn.

'Yes, madam.'

'You are not deficient in imparting the art of politeness, I trust ?' queried the monotone.

'I think not,' I said.

'I trust not,' said the monotone emphatically.



‘Do you draw?’ enquired Mrs. Fairborn.

I replied that I did.

‘Of what creed are you?’ asked Mr. Fairborn abruptly.

‘I am a Protestant.’

‘You are not, I hope, tainted by the slightest flavour of Roman Catholicism?’

‘No,’ I answered.

‘I hope not,’ said the monotone. ‘Have you been a regular church-goer?’

I could answer in the affirmative, for the question was a wide one.

‘And what may be your age?’ asked Mr. Fairborn.

‘I am in my twenty-first year.’

There was a pause; still steadily watched, I suffered my eyes to fall, and began to play with my fingers.

‘Are there any more questions you would like to put to her?’ enquired the monotone.

‘None,’ was the answer.

Mr. Fairborn stalked away from the group and looked at himself in a girandole.

‘That will do,’ said Mrs. Fairborn to me ; ‘my husband and myself will think the subject over. We wish you to understand that we have consented to this interview only out of respect for our friends Dr. Monck and his mother, Lady Monck ’ (what an emphasis was there ! and besides, what had Lady Monck to do with it ?), ‘for without Dr. Monck’s recommendation we should never have dreamt of meeting you or any other person who had no references to give. You shall have our decision by letter in a day or two.’

I rose, and, bowing to her, advanced to the door. As Mr. Fairborn did not offer to open it for me, but contented himself with staring as I passed, I opened it myself, and made my way as best I might out of the uncomfortable house.

The interview had been a prolonged one ; the sun was levelling its beams as I made my way home. The room in which I had been sitting was warm, and the presence of the staring family had made it, to me, quite hot.

I kept my veil up to catch the cool breeze. As I turned a corner of the road, a man raised his hat. I looked, and recognised Dr. Monck. He seemed half-disposed to cross over to me ; but, not guessing his design, I bowed and passed on. When I looked again, he had disappeared.

On reaching my apartments I found the tea-tray on the table and Mrs. Shaw eagerly awaiting the news. I threw myself into a chair, saying :

‘I have nothing definite to tell you ; I shall almost be sorry when I have. You have been so kind to me, I shall quite regret having to leave you.’

‘Who could help bein’ kind to you?’ she said, displacing the tea-tray only to rearrange it again ; ‘you’re only born to be loved, an’ it’s a shame and a pity as that one so tender and pretty as you has to work for their livin’. I only just wish I was a man that I might marry you!’ She vanished for the kettle. On her reappearance I made her sit down and hear my

story. What I told her—that I was likely to procure the situation—I believed; for in reviewing the conversation I found myself dwelling upon Mr. Fairborn's commendation: 'She is lady-like; she would make a good example.' There was certainly hope to be extracted from this; and Mrs. Shaw agreed with me in thinking it auspicious.

'Well, Mrs. Shaw,' I asked, 'have you seen Mrs. Trundle?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I have seen Mrs. Trundle; she knows them Fairborns well.'

'Indeed!'

'There's nothin' agin 'em as she knows; except that he holds the plate at St. Matthew's every Sunday, an' is horganising a Bible Society for the *di*-fusion of the Holy Gospel in th' Northern parts of Roosia—Roosia or Proosia, she said; it's both maybe.'

'There is nothing discreditable in that,' I remarked.

'Lor no. People knows what they're about, I suppose, when they pays their money to them

societies. But Mrs. Trundle don't much admire that sort o' thing. You see she were robbed of a two months' washin' bill by a gentleman as had a mission somewhere in London, and preaches sometimes in one of those things called Tabernacles ; and she has a darter as has jined the Methodys, which she says is a-killin' her with—with—'

'Too much religion?' I suggested.

'That were her meaning,' she answered. 'But it were some word like tooth-ache an' spasm.'

'Enthusiasm?'

'Ay, that were the word. Lor no!' she suddenly broke out, 'Mrs. Trundle hadn't a word to say agin th' Fairborns. She did indeed say that Mrs. Fairborn was purse-proud, and that Mr. Fairborn was a little too fond o' runnin' arter other men's wives and darters to suit her book. . .'

'Did she tell you who Mr. Fairborn was?' I interrupted. 'What employment he followed?'

'Yes. He was a large Manchester clothier

who bought a factory here as aggravated his fortin ; then he sold everything off and built the house he lives in and became a private gentleman.'

Well, in my own mind, I should have given him some such origin, some such antecedents. Something of the kind was as clearly proclaimed by the house he lived in as if he had written the word Tradesman on his back. However, whatever he had been, and whatever he was, could not matter to me. It suited me to serve him and his wife in the capacity I had volunteered ; and, provided I was comfortable, he was not really more to me than a hotel-keeper. He was to board me, feed me, pay me, and in return I was to take charge of his children. The difference of our positions, which it was very likely he would quickly recognise and rigidly enforce, would keep us well asunder. With his wife I might have more to do ; but if I discharged my duties conscientiously, I had little, I should say, to fear from her ; whilst every day I lived with them would be habituating me

to the calling I had resolved to pursue, earning for me a testimonial, and giving me time to watch for opportunities which would enable me to better myself. The decision I therefore arrived at, after calmly recalling and musing over the appearance, the air, and the conversation of these people, and Mrs. Trundle's stories about them, was that, should I be offered the place, I might congratulate myself on my good fortune.

On the evening following my interview the postman brought me two letters. One I at once recognised as from Dr. Monck; the other must be from the Fairborns. I was sincerely surprised, for I had not reckoned on receiving their decision within a week at least. With a palpitating heart and trembling hands I tore open the elaborately-crested envelope, and read as follows:—

‘The Abbey, July 1, 18—.

‘Mrs. Fairborn’s compliments to Miss Howard. She begs to say that Miss Howard’s offer of services is accepted, subject to the con-

dition of a trial lasting one fortnight from the date of her entry. If Miss Howard does not suit, she is to be discharged without warning at the expiration of the fortnight. Miss Howard will please commence her duties on Monday.'

Written in a sharp thin writing, well fitting the language. I bit my lip, for the terms of this letter sorely stirred my pride. It was such a letter as a vulgar mistress would hesitate to address to a scullery-maid. Still—my application was successful! I recalled the doubts and fears that had harassed me ever since my flight from my husband; I imagined the position I should have been in had the letter contained a refusal. Reflection pacified my pride. I flung the letter down with a light shrug, and turned to the other envelope. This contained the following missive:—

'The Elms, July 1, 18—.

'Dr. Monck, having been informed by Mrs. Fairborn of her intention to engage Miss Howard as governess, desires to offer his cor-



dial congratulations. There may be something of selfishness in the pleasure with which Dr. Monck heard Mrs. Fairborn's decision. He is glad to have been useful to one whose friendless position has excited his liveliest interest, and he is rejoiced at the opportunity that will be afforded him of occasionally meeting and enjoying the society of Miss Howard.

‘Miss Howard will perhaps be interested to hear that Mrs. Fairborn's decision was hastened and confirmed by the favourable impression which Miss Howard left upon Mr. Fairborn.’

## CHAPTER III.

UNLESS I have wholly failed in my endeavour, the portrait I have given you of myself does not represent a strong-minded woman. Strong-minded I am not. I could not address a crowd from a platform on the subject of women's rights or wrongs; I could not wear my hair parted on one side, and simulate the appearance if I could not enjoy the privileges of men; I should be sorry to see the word Doctor before my name, nor would I intrude upon any one of the domains which, by reason of their demands on sinew, courage, and coolness, should belong exclusively to the strong. I write as one who has been so poor as to need occupation to get me bread; as one who, having looked eagerly around for opportunities, has found only those

offered which have been open to women in every age of barbarism and civilisation.

I have asked the World for work, and the World has answered, 'I give you choice of three occupations: teach, sew, or scrub.' I might have answered, 'I cannot sew, I will not scrub, and I detest the humiliation, the trials, the contumely, that break the spirits of those who teach.' The truth is, Marriage is the world's provision for women. It was a sentence often in my poor father's mouth, and it is true. The magnanimous world cries to us, 'Marry! I will find work for your husbands; they shall support you.' But the world forgets that it is not given to every woman to marry; that on the contrary there is a vast crowd of women who never do marry. It forgets, too, that food is as necessary for women before marriage as after. Marking only the married, the world blinds its eyes to those who are husbandless, and to those who have to wait and eat before they are wooed. The great mob of single women who stand out in the cold and the darkness are not

seen ; those only are surveyed who sit by the light of their hearths. These the world pets as its *protégées* ; the others, poor things, must e'en do as they can.

Had more available opportunities been given to me, I should not have become a governess. Mrs. Fairborn's letter had struck me hard ; the sense of something achieved was, indeed, balm to the wound ; but the dull pain in my pride throbbed at times. Willingly then, even at the last, would I have declined the position had any other situation been offered me in which the feeling of subordination would have been less absolute.

With the money I had left I added a few articles to my wardrobe ; sufficient, I trusted, to protect me from the sneers which Mrs. Fairborn's story of one of my predecessors warned me to expect. No hour for my appearance on Monday had been named, so I chose the morning. Mrs. Shaw parted from me with feelings of real sorrow ; though her farewell saddened, her regrets gratified me. They showed me a

capacity for making friends and exciting interest, and I felt that the only chance I had of pushing my way in the world lay in earning the affection and support of those about me.

It was a ripe summer morning. The streets stretched white and dry; the sun found brilliant reflections in the shop-windows; busy people with anxious faces hurried about; over the verge of the town the air hung dim with a neutral gray tint from the smoke of the factories. I had hired a lad to carry my trunk, and, followed by him, I walked hastily along the warm pavements. On gaining the gilt gate I rang the bell; the footman appeared, and with a lazy saunter approached to admit me.

‘There is my box,’ I said; ‘will you take charge of it?’

‘The lad had better carry it upstairs,’ he answered. ‘This way, young ’un,’ to him; to me, ‘Will you follow, please?’

He conducted us to the side door, passed in first, and shouted ‘Marsh!’ A middle-aged woman appeared. ‘Show the lady to her bed-

room,' said he. 'The boy 'll carry the box.' Up two flights of stairs we mounted, meeting no one and hearing no one. The servant opened a door and admitted me into a bedroom. A large square apartment, undeniably clean and new, with an iron bedstead snowily quilted, strips of new green carpet upon the floor; new japanned furniture, and white muslin curtains in the windows; the whole being made to look bare, however, by too much nakedness of light-coloured papered wall. The box was deposited on the floor, and the boy and servant turned to depart.

'Is Mrs. Fairborn in?' I said.

'Yes, miss; she's in the schoolroom.'

'When I have removed my things will you kindly conduct me to her?'

'I'll go and tell her you are here.'

I went to the window and looked out. The room was at the back of the house. The treeless garden, blackly-bedded, and hedged by the flint wall, extended beneath me. Beyond was the country, lying cool and green beneath the

deep blue sky ; to the left I could see the outskirts of the town, red-roofed houses, tall chimneys breathing their murky smoke, whilst I could trace the white sheen of the still canal thinning into a silver thread as it wound and vanished among the distant hills.

Removing my bonnet and jacket, I gave my hair a becoming touch or two, and stood waiting for the servant. She came presently, and bidding me follow her, led me down the first flight of stairs. We were now in a sort of gallery, somewhat resembling the organ-loft in small churches, with three doors leading into apartments. Leaning over this gallery I saw the hall below, flagged with tinted tiles and lighted by stained-glass windows over the door. Two large oil-paintings hung in this gallery : a man and a woman habited in the Stuart costume ; somebody's ancestors no doubt, but hardly the Fairborns I should say. The servant tapped on the centre door and opened it ; I entered.

I found myself in a room a little larger than

my bedroom. The walls of plaster were dyed pink; around them were suspended several large maps. Upon the broad mantelpiece stood a small globe; over the globe was hung a framed square of Bible texts, in very black old English letters. The floor was uncarpeted; some chairs were arranged around the room; in a corner was a bookcase lined with school-books. At a low solid table in the centre sat Mrs. Fairborn; confronting her were her two children. Mrs. Fairborn rose when I entered, and with an icy inclination, retreated to the mantelpiece, where she remained standing.

‘Have you seen your bedroom?’ was the first question she asked. I replied that I had.

‘I believe you will find it comfortable.’

‘I have no doubt I shall, thank you.’

‘The paper,’ she continued, ‘is in very excellent condition. You will oblige me by taking care not to hang any damp garments against it. Mr. Fairborn is very particular about his paper.’

‘I will take care,’ I said.



‘I am reminded, Miss Howard, that the subject of salary was not mentioned during our interview, and I was unbusiness-like enough to omit to mention in my letter what I am in the habit of giving. I may as well tell it you now. It is forty pounds a year, and you are found in everything.’

I thought it injudicious to mention this subject before the children; if I was to influence them my dignity must be sustained. I glanced at them; they were staring at me with riveted orbs; their stolid countenances expressed nothing but stupid curiosity.

‘I hope my terms suit you,’ said Mrs. Fairborn.

‘Quite,’ I replied.

‘During the time,’ she went on, ‘we have been seeking a governess, I have undertaken the children’s education myself. Charlotte will require your close attention; Bessie you will find intelligent. I shall leave their education entirely in your hands, examining them from time to time to remark their pro-

gress, and to ascertain the effect of the system you may choose to adopt. The plan that has hitherto been employed is to restrict the hours of tuition to the morning from nine until half-past twelve. We breakfast punctually at eight. At one o'clock we assemble for lunch. You will afterwards, should the weather be fine, take them for a walk, returning for dinner which is served at five. I could desire, during your walks, that your conversation should be always directed with a view to their improvement, and that you will never omit to insist upon such small features of etiquette as may occur to you. When my daughters enter the world I could wish them to be distinguished by their ladylike behaviour.'

'I thoroughly understand you, and will take care to remember your wishes.'

'After dinner you will retire with them to this room, and prescribe the lessons for the next day. This will occupy you until tea-time. I shall then be pleased with your society for the remainder of the evening.'

I bowed, feeling pretty satisfied on the whole with the programme.

‘I hope you will suit me,’ she said, making a movement towards the door, which I took care to open for her, she recognising the act of politeness with the first smile I had as yet seen on her face. ‘I have a great horror of changing; and, perhaps, it may give you confidence to be told that your manners and appearance have very favourably impressed me. Do you sing?’

‘A little.’

‘Do you play the piano?’

‘By ear only.’

‘Neither of my daughters has the slightest musical taste. We are, therefore, determined to be at no expense providing them with masters. Music is a faculty which no amount of education can inspire; and playing the piano is, now-a-days, really so very common an accomplishment, that I would rather not have my daughters play at all than play badly.’

‘I quite agree with you.’ I spoke sincerely.

‘Luncheon will be served at one ; you will hear the gong. I will now leave you with the children.’

She bowed, I bowed ; and the door closed.

Whilst my impression of her was fresh, I should like to have thought about her a little ; but the children were there and I must go to them. The prevailing idea she had left on me was that she had a good deal more common-sense than she either could or cared to express. Yet how repelling ! how chilling ! In her veins ice seemed to stiffen ; in her character of frost no faintest element of fire was discernible. Was this air natural to her, or was it a mask ? If a mask, what was the object of her disguise ? Let me have patience ; I might make some discoveries by and by ; meanwhile the first scene of the new drama in which I had entered was not half so bad as I had feared.

I am not going to bore you with an account of my conversation with the children. I will not force you to skip a page, if I

can help it, by the chronicling of small beer, and very small insipid beer I am afraid you would find the conversation were I to detail it. I tried to get them to talk, but for a long time could barely extract even monosyllabic replies. I endeavoured to recall what had pleased me most when I was their age ; I invoked memory and questioned her upon the subject of my childhood's sympathies, and then I addressed them. Did they like birds ? No. Did they like dolls ? No. Did they like ponies ? No. Were they fond of looking into shops ? No. Were they fond of walking into the country, peeping at birds' nests, watching the rabbits frisk, culling nosegays from the woods, or robbing the hedge-bank of its strawberries ? No. Desperate, I asked them what they *did* like. Bessie's answer came quick : she liked talking to Gumbles.

Who was Gumbles ? He was the footman !

'And pray,' I enquired, 'what can you find to please you in Gumbles' conversation?'

'He is very religious,' she answered.

‘What!’ I cried, ‘that footman religious who opened the gate for me this morning?’

‘Yes,’ she replied; ‘he knows ever so many pretty tract-stories off by heart, and tells me them.’

‘But does your mamma allow you to talk to a footman?’

‘I don’t know; papa says I may.’

Here was something droll; something new; something piquant. I turned to Charlotte: ‘And what do you like best?’ I asked.

Hesitatingly her answer came; she had a faint cast in the right eye, and I thought I detected something hypocritical in the expression that came upon her face as she answered,

‘I like going to church with papa.’

‘A very religious family,’ I thought, turning to gaze at the texts over the mantelpiece. I ran my eye through them, and then accosted Bessie.

‘Who selected those texts?’

‘Papa; he copied them out of the Bible,

and then sent them to a man to be done like you see.'

I examined them again; from first to last they were denunciatory: the Commination Service in epitome; fierce, unqualified invective; sentences to vibrate in the mind, to thrill the soul with terror; preaching God, not fatherly, not loving, not merciful, not compassionate, not even wise; but vengeful, merciless, terrible, tyrannical; texts to shape the conceptions of a Supreme Being in the young mind into an omnipotent monster, a species of infallible Ghoul, an immortal Afrit!

A hollow, metallic reverberation, faint at first but swelling into a roar, burst upon my ear.

'Lunch is ready!' cried Bessie; and with unexpected alacrity the children bounded off their chairs and vanished from the room. I followed them as quickly as I might. The house was full of the suggestions of disciplinarianism: and I could guess that punctuality at meals was very rigorously insisted on.

The door of the dining-room was open ; the children had entered and I followed. Mr. and Mrs. Fairborn stood erect at each end of the table ; the two girls took their seats by each other, whilst a vacant chair was solemnly pointed out to me by Mr. Fairborn. Near his master stood Gumbles, looking limp and pious in the attitude of clasped hands and slightly raised eyes. Partly suspecting what this heralded, I remained standing. Suddenly Mr. Fairborn burst out in a loud nasal monotone : he recited a grace, a grace that lasted exactly six minutes by the clock which I could see over his shoulders, and then sat down, airily dividing his long coat-tails to make way for his falling form.

Gumbles removed the covers and the lunch was exhibited. It was no anchorite's fare ; no cold lentils, salt-fish, or vinegar without oil. A plump capon fronted Mr. Fairborn ; some daintily cooked veal cutlets were placed opposite his lady. Facing me was a fine sirloin of cold roast beef, flanked, as the romancist



would say, on either side by a large bowl of salad and three dishes of vegetables. Massive cut decanters charged to the stoppers were disposed at each corner of the table, and at Mr. Fairborn's right hand was a handsome silver claret-jug.

I had little appetite, nor was I very heartily pressed to eat. Though Mr. Fairborn occupied the carver's chair, Mrs. Fairborn did the honours of the table, but very freezingly. Gumbles came round to me and poured some sherry into my wine-glass. I could not help noticing that, whilst he charged the glasses of the others, mine he barely filled by a third. I watched him as he stood at Mr. Fairborn's elbow; for what Bessie had told me of his tract-lore made me take quite an interest in him. I sometimes caught his eye fugitively watching me; but it would drop or be averted on being detected; whilst, with an abruptness which I am sure would send a pit into roars of laughter, the corners of his mouth would curve into an expression of Tabernacular sanctimony.

Mr. Fairborn seemed possessed of a very uncommon appetite. He ate eagerly and rapidly, posting large pieces through his mouth as though he was acting under some special instructions to obstruct as much as he could the process of digestion. He drank wine, it struck me also, pretty freely. Me he took no notice of until the repast was almost concluded; then, Gumbles being away, having discharged his last office of waiting by placing a fine stilton cheese before his master, Mr. Fairborn pushed his chair from the table, and, hooking his thumbs in his waistcoat sleeves, honoured me with a prolonged stare. Presently his eyeglass fell.

‘Well, Miss Howard, I hope you’ll be comfortable here.’

‘I have no doubt I shall, sir.’

‘Charity, what sort of a lunch has Miss Howard made?’ he asked in his monotone. This must be his natural voice, thought I, for there is sherry enough in his cheeks and claret enough in his eyes to justify the

exhibition of a little real nature in him if he had any.

‘She did not eat much,’ answered Mrs. Fairborn, who if she had been chilling had also been observant.

‘What do you think of my daughters ma’am?’ he next enquired, replacing his glass in his eye.

‘We shall soon become good friends I hope,’ I replied, looking at the two girls, who had drawn their chairs close together and sat elbowing each other like a pair of incipient idiots.

‘Do you see nothing to correct?’ asked Mrs. Fairborn, raising her pale mist-like eyes to my face.

‘I do,’ I answered, seeing that she referred to the young ladies’ queer gesticulations; ‘but I should prefer, if you will permit me, to reprove them when alone. Admonition seldom comes graciously before others. I shall hope to soften every little angle down in time; but I must be allowed to use my own method.’

Mrs. Fairborn inclined her head; Mr. Fair-

born stared at me with as much approval as his face could express.

‘Will you oblige me by saying,’ said Mrs. Fairborn, just looking around as though to ascertain whether the room held other listeners besides ourselves, and then glancing at her husband, ‘whether you approve of intimacy on the part of young ladies with servants?’

‘Decidedly not,’ I replied.

‘Bessie,’ she continued, levelling her gaze at the girl, ‘is somewhat given to indulge in long conversations with Gumbles. Mr. Fairborn sees no objection; I, on the other hand, look upon it as an error that demands correction.’

‘My servant Gumbles,’ said Mr. Fairborn drawlingly, and stretching himself back, ‘is a pious man. His influence cannot be injurious; it must be beneficial. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself does not know his Bible better than Gumbles. Bessie is as likely to be edified by his conversation as by any sermon.’

‘But he is a footman,’ said Mrs. Fairborn.

‘The Apostles were fishermen,’ replied Mr.

Fairborn; 'there are saints who have been tanners, and prophets who have been ploughmen, and preachers who have been haberdashers. The vocation of a man has nothing to do with his immortal soul. Why should not Mr. Gumbles be as righteous a man as St. Simeon?'

'He is a footman,' repeated Mrs. Fairborn, 'and I object to my daughter having too much to do with him.'

'Are you sure he is so very pious?' I ventured to ask.

'Madam,' said Mr. Fairborn with a pompous drawl, 'when I tell you that whenever that man has been unexpectedly stumbled upon he has been found reading the Scriptures or some pious book; that he goes to church three times on Sunday——'

'Of which Marsh very properly complains, for she has to do his work,' interposed Mrs. Fairborn.

'That he never drinks——'

'Mr. Fairborn, you are deceived,' again in-

interrupted Mrs. Fairborn rising, a signal which I obeyed ; ‘but I will not argue the question with you. Miss Howard, will you please take the children for a walk ?’

I left the room, followed by the two girls. I was much amused by this little episode ; it showed me, at all events, that Mrs. Fairborn was not quite the mistress her cold hard manner and raking voice had suggested her. The girls being dressed, we started out, choosing a road that led away from the town. The air was sultry ; the sun poured scorching rays, and I was glad to seek refuge from the burning glare in a tolerably thick wood which stretched its sea of greenery for more than a mile. We entered it by a kind of turnstile ; a narrow but beaten path ran and lost itself among the thick gnarled trunks whose long roots veined the earth in all directions. Exquisite were the lights falling through the interstices of the dense foliage ; on topmost boughs the sky showed through the yellow transparent leaves ; musical whistlings reverberated through the length and

breadth of the irregular, echoing canopy ; the place was cool as a cavern, and I proposed that we should seat ourselves. The children assented ; I threw myself on the long soft grass and the children grouped themselves at my side.

They had grown a little more communicative now. But there was a kind of stolidity about them which, whether inherent or acquired, submitted a conundrum which it taxed my ingenuity to solve. Their minds seemed to me dwarfed and stunted by the atmosphere in which they had been reared. They were plants, not indeed sickly, but offering no promise of blossom. Though I should like to have asked a few questions just to enable me to get a better notion of the people in whose society I had been thrown, I carefully avoided all enquiries. They would probably repeat the conversation to their mother ; and I had no wish to prejudice her against me by leading her to think that I was in any degree curious. So I rambled on in my talk on every subject that occurred ; not always sure that they were listening with much

interest, but persisting simply because I felt it was my duty to do so.

We were seated within a stone's throw of the footpath. Feeling no disposition to walk, yet understanding that the children had been sent out for exercise, it struck me that the purpose would be achieved without fatigue to myself if I could only induce them to run about.

'Bessie,' I said, 'some of these days I shall ask your papa to give you and Charlotte a little slip of ground apiece in his garden for you to rear flowers in.'

'I should like that,' she answered, but with little eagerness.

'Then I shall be able to compare your tastes,' I went on, 'and see which can make her bed look prettier.'

'Oh, I'll make my bed look prettier than Charlotte's,' she cried, 'for I'll get Mr. Gumbles to help me.'

'And I'll get the gardener to help me; he's cleverer than Gumbles,' said Charlotte.



‘Well, children,’ I exclaimed, ‘I’ll give you a chance of proving to me now which has the better taste. Go each of you and pick me a little nosegay ; you will find plenty of daisies and buttercups, and harebells and wild violets, close beside the trees ; and I see some fern too. Pick as many of the different flowers you find as you choose ; arrange them in their colours according to your taste ; put leaves and ferns among them and outside, and bind the stems with long grass.’

The suggestion stirred their ambition ; true to the child’s nature, they were only to be excited by being opposed in direct antagonism. They rose, left me, and in a few moments were busily peering for materials for their bouquets. I was watching them with slight interest, when my eye was attracted by the approach of a form which showed and vanished in and out the trees as it advanced. In a few moments it was near enough for me to recognise—Dr. Monck. He approached leisurely. The children were nearer to him than I ; he addressed them, and looking

about espied me. Towards me he came at once with a smile.

‘An unexpected pleasure!’ he exclaimed, raising his hat. ‘If I did not know for certain that the mythology which gave dryads and nymphs to the woods was irretrievably exploded, I should have been startled by this encounter. Your guardian shape looks well appropriated by this fine tree.’

‘I am afraid that the dryads did not wear cloth jackets and hats,’ I returned.

‘Your costume would not have disillusioned me,’ he exclaimed, with a laugh. ‘The disenchantment lies there;’ he pointed to the children.

‘Dr. Monck, before I say another word I must thank you with deep sincerity for what you have done for me,’ I began.

He held up his hand.

‘Miss Howard, I must entreat—I must command—not another word. I am easily embarrassed; have pity upon me.’ Then, ‘And what do you think of the Fairborns?’

‘I have hardly made up my mind about them,’ I answered. ‘So far I find them answer fairly enough to your description. He is pious ; she cold. As yet I have nothing worse to say of them.’

‘And Gumbles?’

I raised my eyes to his frank face and laughed.

‘Do you know him?’

‘I have heard Fairborn commend him for his piety ; and I have watched him waiting at table. His sleek look is truly dramatic. I hope the Fairborns treat you kindly?’

‘So far I have really no complaints to make.’

‘You see,’ he went on, taking a step towards the tree, and reclining his lithe, shapely form against the great trunk, ‘I look upon you as a sort of *protégée* of mine ; and having in a measure helped you to procure this post, hold myself responsible for the treatment you may receive. The Fairborns are not gentlefolks, to use the expressive word ; and my experience is that no one is safe in any society but the best.

Pardon me for my freedom, but your face assures me of great refinement ; you belong to a caste as superior to the Fairborns as the Nevills are to the Caringtons. Your sensibilities will occasionally suffer shocks from Mr. Fairborn ; your pride will be sometimes lacerated by his wife.'

'For that and worse I am prepared,' I said.

'But you will not suffer it. You will haughtily resent any indignity ; and more—you will tell me, when we meet—which we shall often do, I hope—whether you are unhappy.'

'I shall tell you nothing of the kind, Dr. Monck. Do not try to make me selfish and ungrateful.'

'Selfish and ungrateful !'

'To you, I mean,' I said, uprooting some grass and twisting it about my fingers. 'It would be selfish for me to bore you with my troubles, and it would be ungrateful to let you know that I am unhappy after you have exhibited so warm an interest in my welfare.'

'Did any of your friends ever charge you

with stubbornness?' he asked, stooping a little, and peering at me.

I looked up at him with a smile.

'No. Why?'

'Be on your guard, then,' he said, with a little laugh; 'for I shall certainly think you stubborn if you will not do as I wish you. I desire, Miss Howard, that should there come a day when you may find your situation uncomfortable, you will unhesitatingly come to me and say, "Dr. Monck, I am wretched." My reply will be, "Miss Howard, if you will leave yourself in my hands I will pledge myself to procure you a position that shall render you happy as—that little bird there," he added, pointing to a bough directly over my head, "whose only business is to swell its plumes to the sun and sing songs from morn till dewy eve.'

He paused; I remained silent.

'Promise, Miss Howard,' he said.

'It would be unfair; it would be intrusive. I have no claims, no right to make such a promise,' I answered.

‘Promise,’ he repeated earnestly.

I met his frank, cordial gaze ; intent, indeed ; but modest, manly, genial.

‘I promise,’ I said ; and then, without knowing why, I felt myself blushing.

I turned my face from him to hide my red cheeks, and angry with my inconceivable embarrassment, began to pull the grass about me with almost vindictive jerks.

Just then Bessie ran up to me, followed by Charlotte ; each held a nosegay. Of the two Bessie’s was undeniably the more tasteful ; I awarded the palm to her, but Charlotte’s I also took care to commend, taking the nosegay from her hand and appearing to admire it.

‘See what a pretty circle those daisies make,’ I said ; ‘but I do not like the arrangement of those buttercups and violets. Don’t you see, Charlotte, that the yellow is too violent for the soft blue of these serene little petals ? See now how much better your nosegay will look.’ I removed the bunch of buttercups, and threw them on the grass. ‘Now,’ I said, tightening

the ligature at the stems, 'your bouquet is as elegant as Bessie's.' I handed it back to her; and, apparently pleased with my commendation, she joined her sister. An animated discussion on the relative merits of their nosegays followed.

Dr. Monck stooped, collected the scattered buttercups, and, plucking a leaf of grass, proceeded to bind them.

'May I have these?' he enquired.

'Certainly,' I answered.

'Will you place them in my button-hole?'

My heart fluttered with a strange feeling of uneasiness.

'They are uncomely flowers for a button-hole,' I said, anxious to avoid the task.

'I do not think so. Please place them for me.'

That 'please place them for me' was uttered with plaintive sweetness. I rose, fearing to be deemed coy, took the little bunch from his hand, and adjusted it in the lappel of his coat. Our faces were close together; so close that I

could feel his warm breath playing upon my brow. Though I could not see him, I felt that his eyes were on my face. The task achieved, I retreated several steps.

‘Come children,’ I cried, ‘it is time to return home.’

They came to my right ; Dr. Monck to my left.

‘I shall hold you responsible, Miss Howard,’ he said, ‘for any deaths that may have occurred during the last half hour among my patients.’

‘Do not add to my afflictions,’ I replied, laughing.

‘If some lamenting wife, some tearful husband, some mourning parent, charge me with neglect, what answer must I make?’

‘To the first two offer your congratulations ; to the third declare your inability to be in two places at one time.’

‘You are cynical : I must be on my guard. Should my congratulations, should my assurance of inability, not be received, what then?’

‘I can help you no further.’



‘I have a book of early English stories at home ; a book full of old, rude tales of knights who have been arrested in their progress through haunted forests by white shapes of women. Enchanted by the silver sweetness of the voices of these forest beauties, their spirits numbed by the lightning of their siren orbs, they have suffered themselves to be held captive bound in fetters forged in the fire of peerless eyes ; and, forgetful of their mission, have been lulled into languid repose by the liquid speech of red lips at their ears. When I reach home I will read this book carefully through ; I will appropriate the legend that will best apply to my experience, and when I am called upon to make my excuse will repeat it.’

I replied with an uneasy laugh. There was something in his tone—its earnestness, perhaps, its suggestion of growing emotion—that alarmed, that even pained me. We were outside the wood now, in the high-road. A lane to our right led apparently to the outskirts of the town. He stopped and extended his hand.

‘Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye,’ I said.

‘Farewell, little ones,’ kissing his hand to the children. ‘Remember me at home.’ He was gone at once.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE routine of my life having once commenced, flowed on with proper monotonous regularity. I fancied I began to understand Mrs. Fairborn; to me, it seemed, hers was no composite character to admit of any other criticism on her deeds than the obvious criticism they challenged. No ifs or buts could qualify one's opinion of her; no sensuous or spiritual occasion could breed impulse to sway her. Directed by calculation, she seemed wholly uninfluenced by sensibility. I felt her character in time, as plainly as one feels the nipping blast that numbs life at its sources. Yet it seemed to me, she was to be pitied too; gracious influences might probably have thawed her character of frost;

it had hardened to iron in the bleak ungenial atmosphere in which she had existed.

Her husband centred in himself the two extremes of sensuality and pietism ; by which latter word let me be understood to mean something very different from religion. He was the greatest canter I have ever met, or ever heard of. This peculiarity he had probably inherited ; it had come to him like any other transmitted disease ; it had also promoted his sensuality ; for there was no earthly reason, but the reason of masking his grossness, why he should have talked in a nasal drawl, why he should have simulated such excessive devotional fervour.

We had prayers night and morning ; long prayers they were ; but though the obvious hypocrisy of Mr. Fairborn made these meetings a species of blasphemous farces, they were to be suffered for the sake of watching Mr. Gumbles. Something not to be forgotten was the attitude he assumed ; great was the spectacle of his up-turned eyes, his lifted hands trembling in the

ecstasy of their embrace. The mirth that his gestures and his mourning voice, as he followed his master in a whisper or a loud monotone, excited in me, was not unmixed with disgust and pain ; I was shocked at the burlesquing of the noblest prayers in the world ; and my sense of the feelings that were due in those who knelt to and implored their Maker, was outraged by the farce suggested, not less by Mr. Fairborn's intonation than by his man's dumb show.

I could hardly doubt that Mrs. Fairborn knew her husband's character well ; yet she never betrayed her knowledge. On the contrary, to me she appeared to accept him literally, believing equally in his religion about which he canted, and in his virtues about which he vaunted. Towards her his conduct was often vulgar and offensive, but she never resented it. Cold as ice, immobile as marble, she received his rude remarks ; no shadow exhibited wrath, no spasm indicated resentment. Recalling my own feelings towards John Graham, I sometimes fancied that she was frightened of him ; and

certainly I did not doubt his capacity of being brutal if he chose. It was written on his meaty cheek, his sensual under-lip, his hazy eyes.

I had now been a week at the Abbey; the days had rolled on with great smoothness. Mrs. Fairborn had suffered me to have my own way with the children; and from this I inferred that she was satisfied with the line of conduct I had adopted, for I knew that she watched me closely, though in a very noiseless wary way.

A cloud had indeed rested upon my mind; but a few days had served to dispel it. Nevertheless my heart was haunted by a presentiment of coming trouble; my instincts were stirring to the unseen approach of a day of gloom, as birds grow disquieted by the storm below the horizon, though the sky above be pure and calm. That coming trouble I could neither shape nor name, it had visited me in my dream, for in my slumbers I had seen this formless vision:—

I stood by the side of a river; the day was

sunny and serene ; I held a bunch of flowers in my hand, and from time to time I broke the petals from the stems and threw them into the current. Suddenly a voice spoke near me ; I turned, not startled, and saw Dr. Monck. With a disturbed face, he asked me why I destroyed the flowers I held ; I could make no answer, but blushed, as I let the naked stems fall in a shower to the ground. He eyed them for awhile, then taking my hand, pressed it to his lips ; he wound his arm around my waist, he held me tightly to him, and whispered that he loved me. I heard and shuddered ; but the embrace was sweet ; my weak being drank in the cordial of his accents ; the amber of my hair fell heavily upon his shoulder ; it was a moment of ecstasy. Suddenly a shadow gathered in the air ; it grew, darkened, took shape, became vital with familiar lineaments ; with a brow menacing and dark, eyes lurid and sinister, a mouth tight and sneering ; the complexion was swarthy, the hair ebon. I shrieked and awoke.

That face ! all through the morning it haunted

me, and then dissolved. For I forced it from my mind, I blotted it from my memory. My great effort succeeded, and in its absence I grew calm. But I accepted that dream as an omen ; it had left behind it a presentiment that gave me trouble.

Meanwhile two facts had forced themselves upon my attention. I noted them with some degree of curiosity and attention.

First of all, Mr. Fairborn, from having been very lofty in his manner, stooping unexpectedly at times to coquet with me, with somewhat vulgar pleasantry (at the dinner-table, but never elsewhere), had grown almost attentive. The first symptoms of this change had shown themselves one morning when I was busy with the girls in the schoolroom. The door having been opened, I raised my eyes expecting to see Mrs. Fairborn ; to my surprise, I saw her husband. With his glass fixed and his hands clasped behind him, he sauntered up to me, and stood silent for some moments at my back, looking over my shoulder. I was busy in trying to



make Charlotte understand that subtraction is not addition ; that, in short, when eight is taken from eight, sixteen is not usually the result.

‘Dreadful work, isn’t it?’ exclaimed the monotone at my back.

I looked up at him with a smile.

‘The one thing needful is patience,’ I answered.

‘Yes ; Christian patience. But the spirit grows restless, and sometimes unwilling ; and then the combat between the resolution and the impulse waxes sore and trying.’

Taking a stride which brought him into a position whence he could command my face,

‘What,’ asked he, ‘do you think of those admonitions selected by me?’ pointing to the frame of texts.

I should have liked to tell him the truth ; but I wanted the courage.

‘They at least serve to keep us in mind of the future,’ I answered evasively.

‘My object ; yet not wholly my object. The youthful soul cannot be too early impressed

with the obligations which its immortality imposes. Oh, it behoves all parents to bring the knowledge of the Lord early before their children. If I did not fear the scoffs of the worldly and the erring, I would have the ceilings and the walls scored with similar texts ; so that whithersoever the eye was directed in *my* house, there should it meet some promise, some suggestion of hell for the sinful, and heaven for the upright and the pure in heart.'

I was anxious to be rid of him and his fustian, and to continue my lessons. His drawl was distracting and intolerable. I noticed that whilst he spoke Charlotte eyed him with a very humble face ; Bessie, on the other hand, drew hideous profiles on her slate. All this while he never removed his eyes from me ; but I was used to his stare now ; I regarded it as a habit, and had ceased to feel embarrassed by it.

'I trust,' he continued abruptly, but never discontinuing his wearisome metallic monotone, 'that Mrs. Fairborn has told you how fully

satisfied we are with your ministrations to these infants ?’

I glanced at the pale meaty face, vacant of expression as a barber’s block, as I answered,

‘Mrs. Fairborn has not told me ; but I am gratified to hear it.’

.. ‘She ought to have told you. Still I cannot blame her for allowing the pleasing duty to devolve upon me. The imposition of a fortnight’s trial is removed ; I beg you will consider it wholly removed.’

I thanked him.

‘I hope you sleep comfortably, Miss Howard?’

‘Very comfortably, thank you.’

‘My servants are, I trust, attentive to you?’

‘Oh yes, thanks, very attentive,’ I rejoined, surprised at this unexpected affability.

‘I trust they are. I am very particular in the choice of my servants, manifesting, I believe, an unusual concern as regards their religious opinions. Those opinions I endeavour to confirm by my example. I am happy to say that during the two years I have resided in this

house, I have not had occasion to change one of my servants. Their fidelity, madam, is the consequence of religious pressure. Perhaps you are not aware that there is a chart of texts similar to that suspended in the kitchen?’

‘Gumbles knows them all by heart,’ cried Bessie.

‘And doubtless the other servants,’ he went on. ‘In the face of such a code of laws they cannot err.’

I heartily wished he would leave the room ; but he exhibited no disposition to go. He lingered, seemingly searching about in his mind for something to say. Fortunately his inactive mind would not come to his rescue ; and fortunately some one came to mine. His lips were in the act of parting to speak, when the door opened and in walked Mrs. Fairborn. Her husband no sooner caught sight of her, than without saying a word, he clasped his hands behind him and marched out of the room.

This was the first symptom, as I have said, of a change in his manner towards me. At dinner

he grew more and more attentive, once going so far, on my declining to take a glass of wine, as to come round, decanter in hand, and insist upon my letting him fill my glass. He now, too, came pretty regularly into the schoolroom when I was teaching the children ; thereby causing me great annoyance ; for he not only embarrassed me by his presence, but suspended my occupation by his drawling chatter. I told him at last, that I really could not go on if he insisted upon presenting himself ; to which he replied, that he could not on any account be denied the privilege of seeing his children instructed ; and begged therefore, that I would allow him to be present on the condition of his not speaking. It was not easy for me to object ; so the consequence was, he would enter the room in silence, take an armchair, posing himself where he could see my face, and remain seated, until he was stirred Quaker-like by some spirit, or by the entry of his wife, to depart.

I was unwilling to think that there was anything very peculiar in this conduct. People in

the position I then was, admit doubt reluctantly when it is likely to interfere with their interests. Odd his conduct certainly was ; but then, Mr. Fairborn was altogether a very odd man ; and this behaviour was probably just as much an expression of his eccentricity as his drawl or his pietism. Beyond the conduct of which I have given you an outline, there was nothing on which suspicion could fasten ; and Mrs. Fairborn confirmed me in the harmless interpretation I placed upon it. She noticed nothing ; no face of stone could have exhibited less interest in what was transacted before its dead gaze than hers. Sometimes, when her husband had been more than usually polite to me, I watched her ; no ray in her pale eyes, no movement of her line-like mouth, no shadowing of her marble cheek, aided me in my speculations. My woman's instincts were baffled ; had Mr. Fairborn's eccentricities exhibited themselves only in his wife's absence, my apprehensions might have been aroused ; but what the wife could view without comment or distrust, the

governess might submit to without suspicion. 'Flighty or flirty, or both, he probably is,' I thought ; 'and he takes advantage of my subordinate position to amuse himself with me after his own dull vulgar fashion. For the present, then, I will cease to vex myself with doubts ; it will be time enough to question and to act when more shall have grown apparent.'

The second fact I am about to mention I regarded as the natural sequence of the first. Undeniably, when I had first come to live at the Abbey, Gumbles the footman had regarded me with no friendly eye ; at the dinner-table he had paid me as little attention as he possibly could ; he had stubbornly refused to give me any of the titles I might have expected from a servant, either Miss, or Ma'am, or even indeed my own name. This obvious impertinence I did not resent ; I hardly knew what influence he might possess in the kitchen, and feared that should I quarrel with him, he might prepossess the servants against me, and so occasion me a

good deal of inconvenience. That Bessie and he were very good friends I had no doubt; he was probably proud of her friendship, regarding it, too, as a fair guarantee of the appreciation on the part of the family of his services. His dislike of me, then, I imputed to the jealousy with which he regarded the influence I had, or might one day have, over his young friend.

But simultaneously with the change in Mr. Fairborn's manner came a change in the manner of Mr. Gumbles. As in the school-room I had marked the alteration in the master, so at the dinner-table I had noted the alteration in the footman. The change fell upon me abruptly; in the shape of Gumbles serving me before his mistress. This I regarded as an accident; but his subsequent behaviour convinced me that Gumbles was no longer my enemy. He insisted, in spite of my protests, in filling my glass; a casual lifting of my eye was sufficient to summon him to my side, attentive and officious, though no such summons was intended. If I happened



to meet him now accidentally in the hall or on the staircase, he would salute me with the oiliest smile at his command. Once I discovered a pretty bouquet of flowers in my room; the gift I presumed of one of the children, or perhaps Marsh the housemaid, who seemed the only natural person in the house. But on enquiry I discovered that it had emanated from no less a person than Mr. Gumbles. Of course I took an opportunity of thanking him; and I do not think I shall readily forget the manner he laid his hand upon his heart, as with a bow, superior to anything of the kind I ever saw in the most ostentatious metropolitan lacquey off the stage, he replied,

‘That he had been moved to serve me, and that the doing of it gave him great and lastin’ appiness.’

Like master, like man, thought I. If Mr. Fairborn’s politeness has its drawbacks, it has its advantages too.

My health had greatly improved : my beauty too had grown maturer ; there was a richer red

on my lip, a riper roundness in my contour, a more luxuriant languor in my eyes. My sense of independence, my freedom from anxiety, were beginning to operate with beneficial results. Into my face there had returned much of its old babyish sweetness; my cheeks had regained their pearly peach-like tint; my tread was more elastic; my gait the pigeon-movement which had often provoked the appellation of 'waddling' from papa. The cloud of my brief married life had lifted from my mind, and sunshine, tempered indeed, and wanting its old soothing, cherishing warmth, was pouring upon me, giving life to hopes that had long lain dead in the dark, and stirring faculties of thought which had been numbed by the bitter cold of my misery.

Of Dr. Monck I had seen and heard nothing. I was not sorry; I did not want to meet him; indeed, I dared not. By one stroke he had made himself master of my gratitude; with that fortress demolished, I feared that the citadel of my heart could be easily stormed.

I knew it would be madness to indulge my mind with thinking of him ; I knew that by doing so I should be conjuring up an apparition more appalling in its nature than even the misery I had fled from. Gauging my capacity for loving, I felt its strength and feared it. To think upon him would be to hope ; to hope would be to despair ; whilst John Graham lived I could belong to no other man.

This I struggled steadily to think of, and to think of only. And yet, strive as I might, I had found my mind furtively recurring to Dr. Monck. That afternoon's encounter in the wood had seemed to me fraught with meaning. My vanity, dictatorial now as it had ever been, would not be silenced by my judgment. No interpretation would suit it but its own. In vain I appealed to Reason : 'Teach me,' I implored, 'to witness in that lingering conversation, in his steady, genial gaze, in that incident of the flowers, no more

than the idle coquetting of a young man with a pretty girl, meaningless as a flirtation avowedly meaning nothing!' No; Reason would not help me here. It bade me bring Dr. Monck's face before me, and whilst I examined the handsome lineaments enquire whether his grave sweet candour of eyes, his frank geniality of smile, conformed to the light frivolous qualities I sought to accredit him with. Vanity shook her wings and crowed. 'Your beauty has captivated him,' it cried; 'for your beauty he aided you; for your beauty he lingered and conversed with you; for your beauty he solicited and secured the present of those flowers; for your beauty he will love you!'

'You must shun him then,' said Reason; 'or if you find it impracticable to shun him, you must shut your ear to his voice, close your eyes to the charm of his face, bolt and bar your heart against the sweet inspiration of his presence.'

Thus with vague foreshadowings, formless

and meaningless as my dream, stole slowly upon me a coming gloom ; not near enough yet to make my instincts sensitive ; not near enough yet to disturb my night with visions nor my heart with determinable trouble.

## CHAPTER V.

ONE day before taking my usual afternoon walk with the children, Mrs. Fairborn had requested that I should return by four; they were expecting a few friends in the evening, she said, and were therefore dining an hour earlier. I complied with her request; and by five o'clock we had finished dinner. Mrs. Fairborn had left the room, and I was rising to follow her, having signalled to the children to accompany me, when Mr. Fairborn approached.

‘I am expecting some ladies and gentlemen this evening,’ said he; ‘you will join us of course?’

‘I would rather not,’ I answered.

‘Why?’ The glass was in his eye, and he stared strongly down into my face.

My excuse was embarrassing enough to name ; but I could not help its confession.

‘I have no suitable dress to wear,’ I said.

‘Though I abhor pampering the vanities of the flesh,’ he remarked, ‘had I known this I would have gladly purchased you a garment.’

‘You are very good,’ I said, retreating a step, for his face was uncomfortably close to mine.

‘Happily,’ he went on, ‘this occasion makes no demand on the lust of the eye. I sometimes have these assemblies, but we do not dress for them. We are counting upon your amiability to give us a little music ; and as I object to cards and dancing—amusements in my belief peculiarly calculated to arouse the bad passions—we shall endeavour to entertain ourselves with song and converse.’

I should have liked to ask who was coming, but I feared the question might be deemed impertinent.

‘You will come?’ he demanded.

‘ Since you desire it, I shall be happy.’

‘ Present yourself as you are ; it is my wish that you should.’

He laid his hand upon my shoulder, perhaps in a fatherly way ; I objected to his touch, shook his hand off, and left the room.

The dress I had run away from home in was a black silk ; two other stuff dresses I had purchased before my coming to the Abbey. The black silk then, with a white body, must be my costume to-night. My fingers were ringless ; my ears without earrings ; one brooch I had—a little trifle in jet. Under these circumstances you will perceive that my beauty was likely to be very unadorned.

The children had left me to get dressed ; Mrs. Fairborn was busy over her toilette in one room ; Mr. Fairborn busy over his in another. My change had not taken me long to effect.

The evening being extremely sultry, I had thrown open the window and seated myself at it, overlooking the country that lay green and dark in the deepening light, and marking the distant



hills melting in the shadow of the rising night. Vague and perhaps not darker than the light shadows growing in the air, my thoughts slipped on dreamily, I hardly following them. My mind seemed half-asleep in the lazy listlessness induced by the calm and heat of this summer's evening. At such moments, as you have doubtless experienced, the ear is keen to sound, the nerves sensitive and easily shocked to pain. Guess, then, the start I gave, when suddenly I heard a clattering, a sound of dragging and puffing going on outside my door, immediately followed by a sharp and persistent knock. I ran to the door, not a little alarmed, threw it open and beheld—Gumbles, very red in the face, standing by the side of a cheval-glass nearly as tall as himself.

‘It’s fatiguin’ work to bring it upstairs: it’s a dead weight,’ he exclaimed pantingly; ‘but it’ll make you the beautifullest pictur, and I thought you’d like to see it.’

Saying which, he threw his arms about it, raised, and carried it into my room.

‘ Oh ! Mr. Gumbles ’—I had learnt to call this man ‘ Mr. ’ Gumbles, partly from having heard Bessie speak of him so, and partly because he appeared too proper, too sleek, too well-fed an individual to take such a liberty with as would have been implied in the title of ‘ Gumbles ’ only—‘ I am sorry you should have been put to this trouble. Of course I am obliged to you ; but really the glass is of no use to me.’

‘ I wouldn’t encourage vanity if I could help it,’ said he ; ‘ leastways in any other person but one of your hattractions ; but you’re goin’ to jine the company to-night, and it’s right you should have a chance of lookin’ your best. You wouldn’t care for some flowers, jest to hold in your hand?’

‘ No, thanks.’

‘ You don’t look amiss,’ he said, eyeing me admiringly from top to toe. ‘ You’ll be a flower among weeds this night, I reckon.’

I looked at him slightly amazed ; for it seemed to me he was growing impudent.

‘ I ain’t much given to admirin’ female

beauty, either,' said he, making an effort to keep his toes turned in and his legs straight, whilst he regarded himself complacently in the mirror. 'Women has susceptible hearts, very full o' naturil vanity, which is easily blown into flames as'll take to roarin' and burnin' if a little coolness ain't thrown on 'em by way of a squencher. But you're too sensible to be set a-fire.'

'I wish you would take that looking-glass away,' I said, hardly knowing whether to feel annoyed or amused. 'It doesn't belong to this room, and it will be missed.'

'I brought it from a spare room,' he replied; 'it won't be missed. Air you fond o' tracts, I might ask?'

'I hardly know,' I said, half turning away as a hint for him to be gone.

'I take the liberty of beggin' that you'll honour me by a castin' your heye over these at your leisure,' said he, diving with both hands into his coat-tails and producing a bundle of leaflets; 'one of 'em as is called "The Godly

Lovier" was wrote by a cousin o' mine, a very holy man as was a gard'ner, who took to preachin' at the sacrifice o' his family. There's another you'll please cast your heye on as is termed "The Saintly Bride," being the true narrative of a young woman named Matilda Thirst, as was cast away on a desert hiland and married a savidge whose full costume was no more than a hearring through his nose, whom she convarted to a knowledge o' the truth, an' set him a preachin' to the rest o' his tribe. A most hinteresting and sentimental narrative.'

At this juncture a bell rang; he handed me the tracts, which I could hardly refuse to take, and with a 'Wishin' you good evenin' for the present,' bowed complacently and vanished.

I laughed aloud as the door closed, threw the dirty bundle into a corner, and—since the glass was there—turned to inspect myself in it. What I saw at once put me in a good temper with myself, and despatched Mr. Gumbles out of my head. Very pretty I looked in my plain but neat attire, with my small waist, my well-

shaped shoulders gleaming like pearl through the muslin body, my arched and alabaster neck, my ivory brow taking a golden tint from the shadow of my thick clustering hair.

A knock came at the door.

‘Mamma is in the drawing-room,’ said Bessie’s voice; ‘will you come down, Miss Howard?’

With a farewell glance at the glass, I descended.

The drawing-room was in a blaze of light; candles on the mantelpiece, candles in the girandoles, candles on the side-tables. A festal air that room wore in spite of the bad taste that matched rose satin chairs and settees with red carpet and red table-cloths. The white statuettes showed prettily through the exquisite tracery of leaves and flowers, among which solitary candles gleamed. The soft summer stars shone in through the open windows, through which no air breathed to flicker a flame or vibrate a leaf.

Mrs. Fairborn reposed with a certain cold

stateliness of posture near the hearth; her two children sat together on stools, conversing in whispers over a handsome volume of engravings; Mr. Fairborn stood at the window.

I drew a gilt-legged chair from the wall and seated myself near Mrs. Fairborn. She was quietly dressed; that is to say she was clad only in the soberest colours. But though her dress of gray silk was of the richest, its flounces of black Maltese lace, each a quarter of a yard deep, I missed those minute details about which a woman of good taste is always solicitous; those finishing additions which stamp the whole with an air of tasteful completeness. I thought she looked very pale and hard as she sat there in her stillness

Before long we heard the sounds of carriage wheels. Clang! clang! tolled the hollow-voiced hall-bell. Mr. Fairborn moved away from the window, confronting me with an outline of black long coat buttoned tight and high, a broad white tie, boots so highly polished as increase to the size of his feet, and a pale

vacancy of red hair, dim large eyes, and bald head.

A dress rustled in the hall ; a man's voice murmured. I felt my heart beating. Why ? Because I was at once hoping that Dr. Monck would and would not come : because I at once wished and feared to see him. The door opened and—

‘The Reverend Mr. Thornton and Mrs. Thornton,’ cried Gumbles, looking singularly footman-like in a soap-shining face, black clothes, white neck-tie, and slippers so tight that his feet bulged in their strangulation considerably over them.

A diminutive man, letting fall the arm of a diminutive lady, ran forward.

‘My dear Mr. Fairborn, how are you ? Dear Mrs. Fairborn, glad to see you are looking so well. Little missies, how are *you* ?’

Then a dead pause whilst he stared at me. Another peal on the hall-bell ; meanwhile Mrs. Thornton, following her husband's lead, shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Fairborn, kissed

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Bessie, stroked Charlotte's hair, and, like her husband, stared at me too.

‘Miss Howard—the Reverend Mr. Thornton, Mrs. Thornton,’ said Mrs. Fairborn.

I bowed; Mr. Thornton advanced his body with a jerk; Mrs. Thornton recoiled, and nearly fell in a curtsy.

‘Miss March!’ roared Gumbles from the door.

In came, or rather ran, a thin, simpering, woman—about thirty-five years old I should say—carrying a roll of music. She entered trippingly, looking from side to side of her, and proceeded to shake hands. She spoke so low, in so mild and milky a whisper, that I doubt whether those she addressed heard what she said. Having bowed to me, she drew off with the little clergyman, and from a series of gesticulations that followed on her part, having reference to her throat and chest, I judged that she was complaining of a cold.

Again the sound of carriage wheels; again the clanging of the hall-bell; some delay fol-



lowed the entrance of the new arrivals, during which a hubbub of conversation had gathered over those who were assembled; Mr. Fairborn's monotone waging war with Mrs. Thornton's shrill treble; Mr. Thornton's pulpity accents replying to the raking soprano of Mrs. Fairborn; Miss March's whisper having grown invigorated with a succession of squeaks, forcing its way into everybody's sentences with perplexing discord of ejaculation and approval.

'Lady Monck, Dr. Monck, and Miss Di-hana Lepell!' shouted Gumbles like a pilot in a storm.


A dead silence; such a silence as falls upon you when standing upon a strand on which great waves are boiling, you suddenly stop your ears. I turned my eyes to the door. A stately, handsome woman stood on the threshold, pausing a moment or two before she advanced; then with a high-bred coldness receiving and dropping Mrs. Fairborn's hand, and bowing to Mr. Fairborn. Behind her was Dr. Monck: at his side was a young lady—a

brunette; tall, slightly *embonpoint*, dressed in blue silk, which fitted her full and solid form as a glove fits the hand; she had a small, superbly shaped head, crowned Greek-like with snaky coils of raven hair, large black eyes, and arched eyebrows, which, combined with the curling upper-lip, lent her face an expression of haughty surprise.

My eye resting long enough on her to mark these general points, reverted to Lady Monck. She had been led to an armchair, an elaborate piece of furniture crowned at the back with a regal crest of gilt; it resembled a chair of state—occupied by that queenly-looking woman it became a throne. I examined her with interest. Her age I could not divine. She was dressed in black tulle; a long massive chain of jet fell from her neck upon the swelling outline of her bust; her lavender gloves encased hands that might have belonged to a girl of ten. Her hair, surmounted by a tasteful headdress, was of dark auburn, through which ran threads of gold like streaks of fire. Her eyes were

light, imperious in their gaze, never melting to the occasional smile that distorted rather than decorated her lips. Beautiful she must have been in her youth ; in this, her middle age, she was the stateliest woman I have ever beheld.

Neither to Lady Monck nor to Miss Lepell was I introduced. Mrs. Fairborn probably thought I was too insignificant a person to merit the honour. Dr. Monck on meeting my gaze had simply bowed ; and now, seated between Miss Lepell and Miss March, was holding a conversation with Mr. Thornton, who leaned across the back of a chair confronting him. All these people seemed to know one another. As the stranger, I felt embarrassed by my estrangement from the various groups ; as the governess, I felt I had no business amongst them. Had the company numbered only those to whom I had been introduced I should have felt at my ease ; but in the presence of Lady Monck and her young friend I seemed to shrink : a social barrier sharply defined by my sensitiveness had grown up between me and the party



they had joined; by their imperious eyes it had been erected, by my sensitive reason it had been accepted. Beckoning to Bessie whose glance I met, I asked her to bring me the book she had been turning over with her sister; then pushing my chair well back, getting indeed as much out of sight as I could, I made the child take a seat beside me, and forced myself to find interest enough in the fine plates I glanced at to keep me cool and quiet.

Gumbles, accompanied by a maid, brought in the tea and coffee. The footman looked about him on entering, and, to my inconceivable annoyance and surprise, approached me at once.

‘Assist the others before you come to me,’ I exclaimed angrily, fearing the glances and even the smiles that the footman’s evident regard for me might draw.

‘Ain’t you as good as anyone here, and better?’ he asked. ‘That’s tea and that’s coffee.’

Seeing that my best course was not to seem to notice anything odd in the man’s conduct, I

took a cup: whilst I sweetened it, he whispered,

‘You didn’t glance over them tracts yet, I suppose?’

‘No,’ I answered. And eager to hasten his departure added, ‘but I will to-morrow.’

He moved away with a smile; I glanced at Bessie.

‘Has Gumbles lent you his tracts, Miss Howard?’ she enquired.

‘Yes,’ I said; ‘two of them.’

‘Oh, you’ll like them; they’re so pretty.’

‘Indeed!’ I said; and to change the subject directed her attention to one of the pictures. I furtively watched Gumbles as he stood before Mrs. Fairborn. Something she whispered, but without a muscle of her face changing; he glanced in my direction with a martyr’s smile. Could a reprimand have been taken so blandly, I wondered? I knew that Mrs. Fairborn hated this man; and yet I had seen enough to remark that she either feared him or would not take notice of his impertinence,

decidedly more offensive towards her in its implications than had it been downright. 'This ugly house is full of very queer inmates!' I thought to myself.

I was bending my head over the book in my lap when I became sensible of some one approaching. I *felt* who it was; it was therefore needless for me to look.

'I have not had an opportunity of speaking to you before, Miss Howard,' said Dr. Monck; 'call me rude, *gauche*—call me something, I merit opprobrium.'

'Why?' I asked, raising my eyes to his face.

'Ay, that's the question.' Then bending, he said in a whisper, 'you will find an excuse in a confession I mean to make to you to-night. I choose this opportunity for my discourse, because you will be better able to understand it having the texts before you. My ostensible errand is to ask you to sing a song; my real one to entreat you to give me a chance of having a ten minutes' talk.'

All this in a voice inaudible to Bessie.

Not comprehending him, I grew suddenly pale. He noticed the change, for he immediately added,

‘My mother and Miss Lepell will be the texts . . . Now, will you sing?’

‘No.’

‘Why?’

‘I know no suitable songs.’

‘I will take no excuse. Your voice is low and sweet; you can sing if you choose, I know. As to the matter of your songs, be it what it may, your manner will make the words poetry, the music faultless.’

‘You are an adept at compliments, Dr. Monck,’ I said in a slight tone of displeasure; ‘cannot you transfer your flattery to Miss Lepell, or the tall young lady whose side you have just left? She has a good-natured face, and will yield at once to your honied solicitations.’

‘You are right to reprimand me,’ he answered. ‘I am a fool to hold such language to you. I should deplore your misconstruction.’

Looking, I beheld Miss Lepell and Lady

Monck staring at us. At the same moment with glass in eye, with hands clasped behind him, Mr. Fairborn sauntered up to us. Dr. Monck turned to him.

‘I am entreating Miss Howard to sing me a song,’ he said. ‘Join your petition to mine, Mr. Fairborn; we may prevail.’

‘If you will not sing for Dr. Monck, will you sing for me?’ asked Mr. Fairborn, with his bold stare.

Choosing to interpret this request as a command, I obeyed. Mr. Fairborn drew my arm through his with what looked like a triumphant smile at Dr. Monck. I felt my arm pressed more than once before I got to the piano. Had he not held me so tight I should have withdrawn it.

When I took my seat, there was a hush; fortunately my back was to Lady Monck; I doubted, should my eyes have met hers during the song, whether I should not have been rendered too nervous to continue. Some one came and stood near me; I thought it was Mr.



Fairborn, but looking up I perceived that it was Dr. Monck.

I paused to recall some of the songs I used to sing to my father ; two occurred to me ; one was a blunt 'Tom Bowling' sort of ballad, melodious, but too rude, I feared, for the refined ears about me ; the other I chose and commenced :—

See her bound o'er the ocean's blue breast  
In a splendour of sunlight and spray ;  
Shining white through the singing crest,  
Arching rainbows to herald her way,  
Glancing onward in music and light,  
Flinging far her rich furrow of foam,  
Rushing on in her beauty and might,  
Like a star through the heavens, to her home.  
And he sings to the gale's hoarse tune,  
O love ! I am coming anon !  
Hearts shall greet, lips shall meet, ere the moon  
From the red nights of Autumn is gone !

The deep sky is throbbing with stars,  
And the ocean lies hushed as the sky ;  
The mad waves have silenced their wars,  
And the wind faints along like a sigh.  
But the gale's brazen bugle shall blow  
Ere the dawn through the starlight shall break ;  
And the rainbow shall arch at our bow,  
And the shrill salt leap in our wake !


And I'll sing to the gale's hoarse tune  
O love ! I am coming anon !  
Hearts shall greet, lips shall meet, ere the moon  
From the red nights of Autumn is gone !

The usual hum of applause followed this performance ; Mr. Fairborn crying ' Very pretty,' and Miss March, ' So kind.'

' Very charmingly sung ; I am sincerely obliged to you,' whispered Dr. Monck. I just smiled at him, and rising from the music-stool, returned to my chair at the end of the room. Bessie had now left me ; seeing me alone, little Mrs. Thornton suddenly tripped across, and pulling a seat very close to my side began a conversation in which she introduced the word ' dear' with amiable reiteration. Broadside after broadside of questions she poured in upon me ; where was I born ? how old was I ? did I like being a governess ? now (confidentially) what sort of plan did I adopt with respect to the religious education of the children ? and so forth.

How long I might have been subjected to this sort of thing I can hardly guess ; she was arrested by Miss Lepell rising and walking very loftily to the piano. Mrs. Thornton at once left me to deposit her form among the 'your very humble servant' sort of group that had collected around the beautiful singer. My view of Miss Lepell was unobstructed. I could see her in her graceful erectness, draped with an amplitude of flowing folds, disposed about her with artistic negligence. Her loose large sleeves as she stretched forth her hands, showed her arms bare almost to the elbows, white, full, and beautiful in their soft curve and tapering wrists. Dr. Monck stood near her ; Lady Monck looked attentively on with a smile.

She struck the piano, ran through a prelude, and burst out suddenly with a rich contralto. Full, clear, powerful were the notes, satisfying the ear with a sense of strength, stirring the heart with liquid vibration. I could not catch the words she sang ; but I fancied the song was one of those sentimental ballads which belonged



to and died out with the era when L. E. L. was thought a poet, when the amiable Lady Blessington was editing albums, and the aged Lady Morgan lionising humbugs. Whilst she sang I watched Dr. Monck. He had folded his arms, and stood looking down, not on her, but on the keys of the piano. In vain I searched his face for some expression of admiration; for some irradiation of the eye, some movement of the lip, or shadowing of the brow, that might give a clue, however vague, however difficult to grasp, to his feelings towards Miss Lepell. No mask could be more stubborn in its immobility than his face. I watched him yet more narrowly, when, amid loud acclamations, she rose from the piano. He thanked her; where she had received the thanks of others with stately gravity, his she received with a melting sweetness of smile that illumined her face as though a sudden moonlight had fallen upon it.

Miss Lepell was replaced at the piano by Miss March. This slim young lady having opened some music began to play what is called 'a

difficult piece ; ' more difficult to listen to than to compose. A musical rigmarole ensued ; her thin hands chased each other up and down the keys, met, quarrelled, fought, darted over and played on either side of each other with fatal facility of execution. The bass growled and plunged ; the treble quivered and screamed beneath the long merciless fingers. Five minutes of this set the listeners impatient. Some one made a remark ; it was answered. Two persons then spoke together ; by and by everybody was talking—and talking loudly, that they might hear each other above the hubbub at the piano.

Wearied by my solitude which no one chose to disturb, embarrassed by it too, for more than once I had met Miss Lepell's prolonged stare and Lady Monck's disdainful glance, I took advantage of the noise to slip from the room. No one noticed my departure. The hall was cool after the heated atmosphere of the drawing-room ; and I loitered to breathe the fresher air. The dining-room door stood open, I entered it.

The table was draped for supper ; two wax lights shed an uncertain radiance from the mantelpiece. The apartment was vacant and hushed : the window wide open ; to it I drew.

The small moon with white horns was floating down the western sky ; the blue was flaked with stars ; upon the distant landscape tiny lights pulsed, and sometimes vanished ; I could hear the sound of the piano breaking out through the open drawing-room window, the tinkling clatter promoting by contrast, rather than disturbing, the great calm of the summer's night.

A few minutes elapsed : the door which I had closed, but not shut, was pushed, and Dr. Monck entered.

‘I saw you leave,’ he exclaimed. ‘Like me, you can find no solace in theology and Miss March’s fantasias. They are as hard at work at polemics as the young lady is at the piano, and I hardly know which is the more cruel, the talkers or the performer.’

‘I have a slight headache,’ I answered. Then

added frankly, 'Besides I didn't like sitting all alone, as though I were a mad woman with whom all intercourse is forbidden.'

'You think me rude for not bearing you company?'

'Not more than the rest.'

'Had I dared,' he said earnestly, 'it would have given me more pleasure than I can express, or than you might believe, to have taken my seat beside you, and there remained the whole evening.'

I made no answer to this.

'I have asked you for this interview,' he went on; 'but I must not flatter myself that it is granted because of my request. If I seize the opportunity you will not think me intrusive?'

'You said you had something to tell me about your mother and Miss Lepell.'

'Exactly. So I have; and because I may be missed and sought after, I will be brief. Miss Lepell is an orphan and an heiress. When she comes of age she will be in receipt of eight hundred a year.'

‘Well?’

‘Well! how coldly you put that inquisitive epithet! Well, though my practice is improving, my mother and I are not rich. The house we live in is our own: mine at least, by right of entail. But our income is not large; not so large but that my mother would wish to see it added to.’

‘I understand. Lady Monck wishes you to marry Miss Lepell.’

‘Precisely.’

‘Have you come to take my opinion?’ I asked, demurely glancing at him.

‘Ay; what is your opinion?’

‘Marry her.’

‘Your advice is excellent; it would delight my mother. To be sure Miss Lepell is a fine girl, is she not?’

‘Very fine.’

‘Did you remark what beautiful arms she has? and then her hair—there’s a dowry for a barber—and what a figure—what an armful!’



‘Are you not making a mistake in sneering at the woman you are to marry?’

‘No doubt. Well—my mother having set her heart upon this marriage, I am obliged to be very careful how I act before her. You must understand that I hate scenes; and though my mother, God bless her! is everything a mother should be, I may as well tell you that she inherits from her father, who was first cousin to the most splenetic earl in English history (I speak of domestic history), a spirit that is not always amenable to the dignified laws of common sense. Having made up her mind that I should marry the beautiful Diana, she watches me with an eye suspicious as the keeper of a lunatic. You are wondering why I did not introduce you to her? My answer is, I would not subject you to her greeting. It is enough that you are young, that you are—beautiful, and more than all, that *I* should have brought you up to her, for you to have received such a welcome as would have made you hate me. Now I do not want you to hate me.’

‘There is no fear of my hating you,’ I exclaimed impulsively. ‘You have been too much my friend.’

I could mark the intentness of his gaze in the pale light. Seriously, earnestly, he watched me; then a change came over his face.

‘Aren’t you surprised to see so stately a person as Diana in the society of the Fairborns?’

‘No. I attribute Lady Monck’s presence to policy. The Fairborns are patients of yours, and being rich demand a little politeness. Miss Lepell being your mother’s friend accompanied her. Now call my candour rudeness.’

‘Looking into your large blue eyes I should have thought you had the most inexperienced, the sweetest, the most babyish spirit in the world. It is otherwise, I see, as respects the inexperience. You go deep; you know where truth lies hid and penetrate to it at once. If you will hold out your hand, I will cross it with silver, and request you to tell me my fortune. You have the gipsy faculty. Give

me your hand—so,’ taking and holding it. ‘Now look into my eyes and tell me what you read?’

I made an effort to withdraw my hand, but he held it tight; the pressure sent a shudder through my frame: a thrill of mingled pain and pleasure. But the pain was keener than the pleasure was sweet; the one heated my blood, the other tortured my heart.


‘I will not speak unless you relinquish my hand,’ I said.

He let it fall; lowered himself so as to bring his eyes to a level with mine.

‘Now read and pronounce.’

I gazed: the starlight made a pale fire in the irids; the dim irradiation suited his clear-complexioned, shapely-featured face.

‘I read loyalty, sincerity, feeling; I read generosity, faithfulness, sagacity. The eye is calm; it evinces courage. It is soft and dewy; it proclaims sensibility. It brightens and darkens to my words; the shadow and the shine in that clear sphere denote faith closely



attendant on each impression; the light and the languor signify a power of affection warm, deep, enduring.'

'Witch! flatterer!' he cried, making an effort to take my hand again; an effort I eluded by clasping my hands behind me. 'Tell my future.'

'Diana Lepell,' I exclaimed, turning away.

Just in time; the door opened, and in glided Mr. Fairborn, with tread noiseless as the footfall of a kitten on carpet.

'Lady Monck has desired me to seek you, Doctor,' he said, an accent of asperity distinguishing his monotone from its usual metallic cadence. 'Miss Lepell missed you at once.'

'Miss Lepell does me too much honour,' answered Dr. Monck.

'We are discussing questions of momentous interest to everyone with a soul,' said Mr. Fairborn; 'Mr. Thornton is in one of his choicest moods to-night. I could have wished, Miss Howard, that you had not missed his very remarkable exposition of the character of St.

John the Evangelist. Madam, he has already annihilated three German infidels and a learned Jew, and I left him leaving two Frenchmen and a Scotch freethinker no legs to stand on.'

Dr. Monck had passed out: unwilling to follow him too closely lest it should look as though we had been together, I went upstairs to my bedroom, promising Mr. Fairborn to descend in a few minutes.

In the solitude of my chamber I held brief but stern commune with my heart. In the short interview I had held with Dr. Monck, the revelation that I was beginning to love him, flashed upon me; for I had taken cognisance of the accents of my voice when, gazing into his eyes, I had told him what I had there found legible; and I had noted that those accents were impassioned. I had marked the strange agitation that had seized me when his hand had held mine; a pain and a joy, too sharp the one, too pleasurable the other, to mislead me as to the nature of the emotion that had prompted them. I felt that I must inexorably nip this passion in

the bud : I must strangle this unnatural nurse-ling in the birth. Love him I could—easily, willingly, passionately. Marry him I could not. To love him, then, would be madness—would be to add a deeper, bitterer curse to my life already crowned with misfortune.

My bane was before : where should I seek the antidote ?

Should I fly from him ? Easily suggested, but a suggestion as impracticable as the dread of poverty, hunger and death could render it. Avoid him ? This indeed I could do. Nay, I might do better. I would drive him from my thoughts ; I would consider him as one separated from me by as adamantine and inaccessible a barrier as ever society piled between two hearts. And should impulse prove too strong, reason too weak, for resolution, fancy should limn upon the tablet of my mind two portraits : the one a splendid showy woman, sumptuously and lavishly dowered by nature, rich, high-born, beautiful ; the other a governess, humble, poor, friendless, disconnected, serving the vulgar for

a famishing stipend, and with no grander ambition than to earn bread and butter. Of my beauty I must not think ; but I must think of Diana's. I must turn vanity out of doors ; drag sentiment from its hiding-place and cast it adrift ; I must own no ruler but reason, and even the dictates of reason must be examined and ratified by judgment ere they could become my laws.

High thoughts ! fine resolves ! showy theories ! You shall see what they did for me.

On re-entering the drawing-room, I found the company grouped about the room. Mr. Thornton, in a Pickwickian attitude, was holding forth to Lady Monck, Mrs. Fairborn, and Miss March. Mr. Fairborn was talking to Mrs. Thornton, Dr. Monck sat somewhat silently by Miss Lepell.

I entered quietly, took a chair within hearing distance of the clergyman, and pretended to become interested in his declamation. Towards Dr. Monck I never once glanced ; Lady Monck, I felt, was inspecting me very

narrowly, but I did not return her gaze. The only people I did look at were Mr. Thornton and Miss March who sat near me; of her proximity I soon made use, entering into conversation with her during Mr. Thornton's breathing intervals.

Thus passed the evening. Supper was announced and the company adjoined to the dining-room. Mr. Fairborn left Lady Monck; Mr. Thornton took Mrs. Fairborn; Dr. Monck took Miss Lepell. Instead of following Mrs. Thornton and Miss March, I lingered in the drawing-room; and when I thought them fairly in, slipped upstairs. I met one of the maids in the gallery.

‘Should I be enquired after,’ I said, ‘please say that I have been forced to retire by a very bad headache.’

In my bedroom I waited some time before I began to undress; fearing a peremptory order to descend. None came.



## CHAPTER VI.

THE hot and languid month of July stole on fleetly to meet and melt in the embraces of August. The golden hay towered in the fields; the bee and the great gadfly and the droning bluebottle wound their sultry horns; the hedges stood sere and dusty along the white burnt roads; in the orchards the ripe fruit fell from rotten stems; and the stubbled meadows lay cracked and baked in the fiery sun. Throughout the day, throughout the night, the windows of the Abbey were kept wide open; for the red bricks wooed the burning beams and choked the interior with an atmosphere like that of a bakehouse.

A fortnight had passed and I had seen nothing of Dr. Monck. During that time I had

in vain essayed to put into practice the resolutions I had framed. Strive as I might, memory recurred to him, passion would reproduce him, hope would gaze plaintively at him, while love stirred uneasily in my soul and implored for freedom.

One afternoon dark clouds had grouped themselves upon the horizon. They thickened, they approached, they foreboded a storm. Our regular walk could not be taken; the storm would burst before two, and leave the roads too muddy to be traversed. Soft lightning played upon the swarthy mass at the back of the hills, revealing cloud-domes, cloud-parapets, the sombre paraphernalia of elemental war. Mrs. Fairborn had requested us to keep indoors; Bessie and Charlotte remained in the dining-room; I, anxious to finish one of the Waverley novels, repaired to the schoolroom, where at least I might count upon solitude and the solace of a comfortable armchair.

The book I held was 'Ivanhoe;' but absorbing as is that masterpiece of a great master, I

could not fasten my attention to it. Perplexed by imagination, my attention wandered, retreated, desisted. I closed the volume, and watched the gathering storm.

It blackened rapidly; it spread like a plague, blotting beauty and life from the sky, subduing, terrifying, petrifying nature as it grew. Ere long it burst; thick drops fell; a sudden wind sighed heavily through the open casement; a forked flame streamed through the gloom, a rattling concussion followed. A gale rose, hissed against the window I had now closed, tore through the weak shrubbery and flowers in the garden; blaze followed blaze, roar followed roar. The sky grew black; the earth stretched a pale wet blank; the hailstones lashed the panes of glass, like small shot from the fierce musketry of the cloud-fortresses; the dim pall swept onward, darting its fiery streaks, bursting its terrible cannonade; then the air cooled, soft glimpses of blue showed through the dun canopy, the flowers shook off their diamond drops, the birds shrilled a piercing

concert, the blackness dimmed away to the east, and the sun laughed again upon a world of pearl and amber.

‘Beauty, gladness, splendour will always assert themselves,’ I thought, as I gazed upon the ruby glory that everywhere scattered itself. ‘It is so with nature, it is so with the heart.’

A faint tap at the door; a face appeared, followed by a form, knock-kneed, loose-trowsered, tight-slippered—Gumbles.

He looked stealthily around him, closed the door very carefully, and approached me.

‘What a storm!’ he exclaimed.

‘What do you want?’ I asked.

He did not answer; but laying hold of a chair, pushed it like a perambulator within a few feet of me; then going once or twice around it, finally seated himself.

‘What do you want?’ I repeated, somewhat nervously.

He watched me, I thought, with unusual impudence. There was a leer in his eye, a jaunty expression about his mouth. He brought

his chair a few inches nearer with his feet, and rubbing his hands, exclaimed in a sepulchral tone, 'Did you read them tracts?'

'No,' I answered defiantly; 'I don't care for tracts.'

'They was full of poetry,' he said.

'I threw them into a corner, and I don't know what has become of them.'

'Why, you told me you'd read them,' he said reproachfully.

'Well, I didn't,' I answered, leaving my chair and standing some distance from him. My dignity would not allow me to remain seated before him, who was seated too.

'I've been countin' on your having read 'em,' he continued in a sort of snoring voice, which sufficiently betrayed his disappointment. 'The "Saintly Bride" was as extravagantly a bootiful story as anything you ever read. When she died, the gentleman she married—for a savidge can be made a gentleman of, when he has such a wife to eddicate him into breedin' as Matilda 'Thirst—I say, when he died——'

‘And I must interrupt you, to ask once more, what you require, Mr. Gumbles.’

‘Won’t you sit down?’ he asked.

‘No.’

‘I’m sorry you’re perverse, for I shall have to stand too, and I like my ease when I’m talkin’. But I think I know too much to venture the liberty o’ sittin’ when you’re standin’.’

He got up, pushed his chair from him by a gentle backward movement of his leg, and approaching me by a stride, folded his hands upon his waistcoat, fell away into his right trowser, inclined his head, and eyed me with a look, so absurd in its conceit, so droll in its admiration, so comical in its slyness, that had I not at once averted my eyes from his face I should have burst into a fit of laughter. At the same time I will not deny that I began to grow alarmed. I was not without apprehensions that he might be subject to fits of insanity; still I determined to linger and watch a little longer, before I left the room.

‘It would ha’ been much more comfortable for me,’ he began, ‘could I ha’ found some one like Eleazer to trust to in a job o’ this kind. You know, he were sent to choose a wife for Isaac. I’m Isaac. But I am not so comfortable as Isaac with Eleazer to do his courtin’ and him to stop at home, and have his wife brought to him.’

‘Are you thinking of marrying, Mr. Gumbles?’ I enquired, the idea dawning upon me that he had come to consult me in his choice of one of his kitchen-associates—probably the cook; that lady, so Bessie had affirmed, having shown an undue hankering after the footman—expecting of course that I would help him in return for the numerous kindnesses he had embarrassed me with.

‘Yes, I am,’ he answered, fixing his little eyes on my face; ‘I’m a thinkin’ of marryin’ very earnestly.’

‘Indeed! I am glad to hear it.’

‘Air you?’ he exclaimed, approaching me with another stride, and speaking in a tone of

relief. ‘Well, I *am* glad to hear you say that. It does me good to hear that, it does. You see, when I’m married, I’ll give up service. I’ve saved some money, pretty nigh a hundred pounds; an’ I’ve got two boxes of clothes in my room, left-off trowsis, and westkits, and coats which Mr. Fairborn has given me since I’ve bin with him. When I’m married, I’d take a small cottage near my brother’s—he’s a market gardener, livin’ nigh Hatchpool—there’s a fine bit o’ ground lying waitin’ to be rented, an’ I had always a turn for gard’ning. It’s a rather ticklish thing tho’ marriage, ain’t it?’

I had reason to know it was.

‘But you see,’ he continued, ‘I’ll jest go at it like a true Nathaniel, a fearin’ no guile, and therefore ‘spectin’ to meet none. Still I’m partikler in my choice; for it’s Solomon as says that a bad wife is like unto a drippin’ house, which judging of it by the name must be a partikler uncomfortable sort of buildin’.’



‘We must hope that your wife will be a good-tempered woman.’

‘Ay!’ he answered, with his eyelid tremulous with a suppressed wink; ‘some one as won’t make me find myself a cryin’ along with the prophet, a few days after the weddin,’ “Woe is me that I’m constrained to have my habitation——”’

“In the tents of Kedar,” I suggested, seeing him pause.

‘Those are the words, miss,’ he exclaimed. ‘Ay, she’s good-tempered enough, I reckon,’ he continued, making a strange smacking noise with his thin lips; ‘as good-tempered as she’s bootiful.’

‘Useful qualities in a wife.’

‘An’ she’s young, an’ she’s eddicated, which ’ll be a credit to me when I writes letters, and she’s a lady.’

What brought Bessie into my head? could it be possible that this man had his eye upon the child, and had come to solicit either my assistance or my silence in some strange tragi-

comical conspiracy concocted between him and that precocious young woman?

‘Young is she, Mr. Gumbles, and educated and lady-like? Pray who may she be?’

‘Can’t you guess?’

‘Do you mean cook?’ I asked.

‘Cook!’ he ejaculated. ‘What, my wife a vulgar woman, with a face like a kettle, and arms like jints of meat, as has lived in the kitchen all her life, so that her hintellect ain’t capable of carrying more nor roastin’ and bilin’!’

He paused to take a deep breath, then advancing another step, laying his right hand on his waistcoat, and dropping his head on one side like a meditative hen, he exclaimed, ‘Try again.’

‘I cannot guess,’ I retorted, recoiling with a mingled feeling of alarm and amusement before the queer piggish look in his eyes, and the sly crumpled smile about his mouth.

‘Why, then, it’s yourself!’ he cried, falling, like a blind beggar in search of a penny, on

one knee, and making a clutch at my hand, which, quick as lightning, I drew away. 'I thought you'd ha' guessed it. I did think that by puttin' two and two together, you'd ha' made four. I reckoned you'd ha' understood what all my uncommon attention to you meant ; sarvin' you fust whenever I could, and a waitin' on yer as if you'd been a duchess. Them flowers—you remember them? Them tracts—I sent 'em out as sort o' feelers, kind o' Eleazers to give you warnin' o' my sentiments. I really do love yer ; fonder nor Isaac loved——'

Here the astonishment that held me petrified succumbed to an irresistible emotion of merriment. Gazing for a moment at the plump, full-bodied man at my feet, with fallow face upturned, well-oiled hair brushed streakily across his forehead, clasped hands, and little eyes made moist with excess of feeling ; I burst into a shout, a scream of laughter, a peal ringing, raking, hysterical.

A moment after the door opened. I looked

and saw Mr. Fairborn. The table in the centre of the room intervening, he did not immediately see Gumbles. Advancing, he exclaimed—

‘I thought you had fainted. Were you screaming or laughing just now?’

Then his eye lighted on the limp form that was making desperate struggles to scramble to its feet. Mr. Fairborn tossed up his arms, approached, and then recoiled, fixing upon me an angry interrogative gaze.

My embarrassing position made it imperative that I should enter into explanations without delay. Glancing at Gumbles, who having gained his feet stood by with face purple, swollen, and passionate, I said,

‘Your servant, Mr. Fairborn, has just done me the honour of offering to become my husband. I had no other reply to make to his striking proposal than the laugh which you have mistaken for a scream.’

Mr. Fairborn looked from me to Gumbles, as though discrediting his senses. Then his

face grew discoloured with a rush of blood to the head. The coarse, animal nature of the man bleared his eyes like a light showing behind smoked glass. He clenched both his hands, approached Gumbles, and in a thick voice exclaimed,

‘Is this true? have you dared to take such a liberty in my house?’

‘Don’t call it a liberty—it ain’t a liberty,’ said Gumbles doggedly, folding his arms and staring defiantly at Mr. Fairborn.

‘It *is* a liberty!’ shouted Mr. Fairborn; ‘an infernal piece of impudence, you villain!’

‘Oh, hearken to him cursin’!’ snorted Gumbles, pointing at his master whilst he turned to me.

Mr. Fairborn was in a towering passion. He trembled from head to foot. His mouth worked as though in the process of mastication. His feet performed a sort of scraping jig.

‘You’ll leave my service!’ he cried.

‘It’ll afford me great ’appiness to do so,’

rejoined Gumbles, with a cool bow. 'But I say it ain't no liberty. If a man o' my position and character ain't a fit husband for a governess, perhaps you'll be obligin' enough to tell me who is?' He thrust his finger-ends into his waistcoat pockets, and looked interrogatively at Mr. Fairborn's hair.

'You're a hypocrite!' shouted Mr. Fairborn.

'A what?' exclaimed Gumbles.

'A hypocrite, sir. And if you don't understand the word—a humbug, sir!'

'I'm obliged to you. Shall I tell you what you are?'

'A hypocrite—a vagabond!' reiterated Mr. Fairborn, more relevantly perhaps than he was aware.

'I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Fairborn,' said Gumbles, insensibly throwing himself into a fighting posture, 'I can talk as well as you. And I'll tell you something which this here lady don't know—Mrs. Fairborn ain't your wife,

but your mistress. There! call me a humbug now! I've heerd a thing or two, I can tell yer,' he continued, turning his inflamed face towards me and speaking with great rapidity. 'And if I don't let every born man an' woman in Huddleston know his cairacter before he's a week older, my name ain't Joseph!'

'Leave this room!' shouted Mr. Fairborn, approaching the footman so menacingly that I shrank away, fearing a fight.

'Hands off!' cried Gumbles. 'Don't you touch me. If you lays so much as the shadder o' your finger on me, I'll knock the wind out o' yer—I'll leave yer nothin' to quote the Scriptures with, I will!'

'Be off!'

'Well, I've had my say. The governess knows the truth about yer, and that's comfortin',' said Gumbles, moving to the door, menacingly, followed by Mr. Fairborn; 'an' I hope she'll be on her guard agin' yer, better nor the poor pale thing downstairs, an' not be deceived by your religion, and comprehend

that you're jealous 'o me, and that's the cause o' this proceeding; an' now may the Lord——'

What followed was inaudible; for, extending his arms, Mr. Fairborn made a rush at the retreating footman, and they both vanished through the door.

Here was a revelation! I had no doubt that it was true. It was the only confession that would reconcile Mrs. Fairborn's conduct with her position.

By the light of Mr. Joseph Gumbles' information everything was clear that had before been obscure. Mrs. Fairborn's submission to Mr. Fairborn was explained. The cause of her coldness, her paleness, her frosty dejection, was revealed. Intelligible now was the footman's half-impudent manner to her, half-familiar to him. Aiming obviously to achieve the distinction of being accounted a very religious man, Mr. Fairborn dreaded the consequences that would follow Gumbles' divulging of his secret. All was made clear: Mrs. Fairborn's strong dislike of the footman: her tame submission to



his impudence. How Gumbles had learnt the truth about these people I do not pretend to know ; but being possessed of it, he must at once have taken to himself a significance which would be very unpleasant for the Fairborns to think on. I dare say they would have parted with a good lump of their income to have got rid of him ; the difficulty lay not only in the doubt that the man would keep his counsel after he had left, but in knowing how to dismiss him without exciting his resentment.

Thinking these matters over, I positively forgot the ludicrous yet somewhat humiliating incident that had led to this queer *dénouement*. Gumbles' parting words cautioning me to be on my guard against Mr. Fairborn rang in my ears. They made Mr. Fairborn's character very transparent to me. I recalled, with a shudder and a great loathing, certain familiarities which the man had forced upon me, such as laying his hand upon my neck, thrusting his face close to mine, staring at me with libertine

eyes. I could accredit him with any capacity for wrong-doing; for I did not need to be told that the very worst nature in the world is the nature that seeks to mask its corruption by a religious exterior. Just now, however, I was incapable of action; nor indeed had anything occurred which would justify the carrying out of hasty resolutions. What I must do I felt was to forthwith start on a search for another situation. Meanwhile the Abbey would afford me an asylum, and even a safe one; for the probability was, that whatever schemes Mr. Fairborn might have been maturing would be delayed, if not indeed frustrated, by Gumbles' plain language. Knowing that I was acquainted with his character, and fearful lest any insult would stir me into making his conduct public, Mr. Fairborn would be now extremely careful in his behaviour.

My reverie had lasted a long time; for the afternoon was far advanced, and upon the sky had come the deep maturity of blue that pre-

cedes the setting of the sun. Suddenly the clanging of the gong warned me to prepare for dinner. Repairing to my bedroom, I awaited the second summons and descended.

Mrs. Fairborn's face was calm, pale, settled ; I searched it curiously, but could gather from it no indication that she had been made acquainted with what had happened. I took my seat with a strong sense of embarrassment. Mr. Fairborn did not seem to notice me for some time ; when at last he addressed me I observed that his manner was singularly harsh and constrained. *Tant mieux*, thought I.

Furtively watching Mrs. Fairborn, I found myself becoming very eager to know how much of the schoolroom episode her husband had related to her. My curiosity was gratified before long ; the cheese was placed on the table, the maid-servant, who had replaced Gumbles, had retired.

'The villain leaves to-morrow morning,' said Mr. Fairborn.

Mrs. Fairborn rarely smiled ; but something

like a smile played across her frosty features as she answered,

‘I’m glad to hear it.’

‘I have told Mrs. Fairborn,’ he continued, turning to me, ‘of the treatment to which you have been subjected by that impudent man. You have her sympathy.’

In corroboration of this Mrs. Fairborn bowed.

‘We would wish you to believe,’ he said, ‘that what that false speaker dared to affirm was wholly based upon his imagination, which, as you probably perceived, was very greatly inflamed by his intemperate wrath.’

I glanced at Mrs. Fairborn; this time there was no smile.

‘I was always under the impression that he was a hypocrite,’ I said; ‘and I have been surprised that you should not have detected him.’

‘We have been fools,’ said Mr. Fairborn tragically.

‘Great fools,’ echoed Mrs. Fairborn.

‘Groaning under a galling yoke,’ pursued Mr. Fairborn.

I saw Mrs. Fairborn give her husband ‘a look’ at this. He blushed pink and buried his confusion in a large tankard.

Here the conversation ended. From it I inferred that Mr. Fairborn had detailed the incident to his lady pretty exactly as it had happened; it also left on my mind no particle of doubt that what Gumbles had asserted was true. Why this conviction, you ask? I answer, intuitive perception, perhaps; or instincts made keenly apprehensive by suspicion; or I saw the truth in the air of these two people; I read it in their mien; I found it in their glance.

Now that Mrs. Fairborn knew that I had a suspicion of her secret, it naturally behoved me to be very circumspect in my behaviour towards her. I must be prepared for much misconstruction. She would interpret a smile, a remark, a look, which would before have passed without notice, into an expression of

contempt, disdain, dislike, as the case might be. She would be dreadfully sensitive ; and I foresaw that if I wished to be at peace during the period I might have to remain at the Abbey, and did not wish to expose myself to the hundred vexations of being perpetually watched and perpetually misconstrued, I must blot her real position from my mind, and establish in its place the fiction of her being Mr. Fairborn's wife. Endowed as I was with sensibilities too refined I sometimes found for my happiness, I felt I should have no great difficulty in threading the very brambly path which had suddenly opened before me.

When I awoke next morning, I found the house astir in the sense of great uneasiness. Descending, I met the servants whispering about the staircase. Mr. Fairborn passed me in the hall ; his face was scowling, his manners agitated, his movements flurried. I passed into the dining-room ; to my surprise I found Mrs. Fairborn up ; her usual time of rising of late had been ten—it was now eight. Bessie and

Charlotte stood together at the window regarding their mother with concerned faces. What could have happened? Had one of the servants died in the night? Had Mr. Fairborn been speculating and received news of a heavy loss?

‘What has happened, Mrs. Fairborn?’ I asked.

She turned a white, placid face to me, and in a voice quiet as though she were bidding me good morning, replied,

‘Gumbles the footman left the house last night, carrying with him a large quantity of plate and his master’s cash-box. It is supposed that he had access to the safe with false keys. Mr. Fairborn estimates the robbery at about six hundred pounds.’ Then in a still quieter voice, tinged, perhaps, with the faintest sneering accent, she added,

‘He has left his Bible and his tracts behind.’


## CHAPTER VII.

GUMBLES was now off the stage. The pious and sentimental footman had made his final bow. Some months after I heard of him. I may as well say now what I did hear. He had been captured, arraigned, convicted. His sentence was a long term of transportation, This sentence he received philosophically ; intimating to the learned judge that should he (Gumbles) have the good fortune to become a ticket-of-leave, he would occupy himself as a missionary, 'in converting the very savigest men he could meet with on the desolatest hislands there was to be found in the ocean.' The audience received this announcement with derisive cheers ; they accepted the intimation as a piece of pregnant irony. I am disposed to think Gumbles spoke seriously.




One Sunday morning—that following the date of the last chapter—we all went to church as usual. Our church was St. Matthew's, situated a mile from the Abbey, and our shepherd was little Mr. Thornton. This building was roomy ; but it was a sad undecorated pile, designed, I should say, by the architect of Mr. Fairborn's residence. A structure new, clean, mortary ; bounded by a gaunt circle of iron railing and yellow gravel walks : inside presenting a long array of mahogany seats which rippled up to and broke round the reading-desk and pulpit. On one side was a large gallery ; so noisy and hollow, that when the two charity schools came tumbling into it, the whole building roared as with a sound of artillery. Our pew was pretty close to the pulpit ; too close to be comfortable, for it involved a stiff neck to keep one's eye for any length of time on the preacher, whilst the booming cadence of the organ hard by always left me with a headache after the first hymn.

The bad singing of an anthem is to me preferable to the caterwauling of charity children.



This looks heterodoxical. I shall be told that I ought to think nothing more beautiful than the lifting up of the voices of little children in praise. For my part, I hear nothing beautiful in it—unless the children happen to belong to a first-rate, highly-trained choir. Nay, I go so far as to protest (as one who has attended St. Matthew's, Huddleston) against the license assumed by a congregation, largely composed of infants who scream, and men, women, and girls who snort, gurgle, and choke, to disturb the charm and the sanctity of devotional song by their horrid discord. Dreadful to me was the hearing the number of the hymn, delivered by the clergyman, for I knew what would follow; I knew the painful yelping, growling, shrieking, that would burst around me when the organ's prelude should cease. And I was perhaps more unenviably placed than any other person in the church. Over me were the charity children—like an orchestra of Jew's-harps—twanging under the inspiration or the terror of the half-starved teacher's eyes; behind me was

a woman who commenced every hymn in A-flat, a woman heavily ringleted, who shook her snaky mane as she yelled her adoration ; before me were two little men who hung together over one hymn-book, grumbling and growling like a pair of dogs over a bone, sometimes bursting into a roar, and then falling dully into an excruciating moan. In our pew, where so much religion was supposed to be boarded in, you may believe we all sang pretty loudly. Mr. Fairborn, I need hardly say, had a voice very particularly his own. Whether he knew the hymns or not, I cannot tell ; but he never condescended to look at his book. With his hand slightly outstretched as though he sang to an audience, he would fix his damp eyes directly on the meagrely stained window behind the pulpit, and with mouth wide open like a cormorant, proclaim not only his utter incapacity as a singer, but his extraordinary ignorance as a musician. At his side Mrs. Fairborn shrilled her raking pipe ; on either side of me the two girls chorussed with aggravating zeal.



A troublesome ordeal would follow in the sermon, if Mr. Thornton preached. His sermons were usually three quarters of an hour long. A mild man by nature, he became a savage in the pulpit. Mr. Fairborn liked him because of his comminatory genius, and certainly few could equal him in his power of broadsiding his audience with commonplace invective. Hell was his text; puling anathema his discourse. The dust flew from the cushion to his thumps; he would perform a semicircle of bows around the pulpit, reminding me (pardon the irreverence of the idea) of the hangman in the farce of Punch and Judy, who, with stick under arm, chases and beats Punch to and fro the edge of the stage. It was all very drear to me from beginning to end. Worship was not to be found at St. Matthew's. The old shook their heads and slept; the young thought of the sunshine outside, and wished that Mr. Thornton would take to open-air preaching that they might listen or leave as they listed. We seldom got home before two; for Mr. Fairborn was Mr. Thornton's

plate-holder. With half-closed eyes, sanctified face, and mummy-like mien, he would stand in the porch with the salver at his chest, like a blind man petitioning alms ; and not until the last of the congregation had left, and Mr. Fairborn had repaired to the vestry to surrender the collection to the expectant preacher, could we leave our seats and emerge from the close tepid atmosphere into life and light.

On this Sunday morning we were about to kneel to the Communion Service, when Bessie whispered to me,

‘ I don’t feel at all well, Miss Howard. My face is so hot, and my hands too.’ She withdrew her silk glove, and laid her hand in mine : it was dry and feverish. I glanced at her face ; her eyes seemed dulled ; a flush suffused her cheek ; she looked as though sickening for an illness. Bending across Charlotte, I whispered to Mrs. Fairborn to hand me her smelling-bottle, adding that Bessie was unwell. The bottle was given me without comment ; and I placed it in Bessie’s hand. I could see that

the child was doing battle with a growing lassitude. Presently she looked at me plaintively, and in a low voice entreated to be allowed to leave the church.

‘Bessie is not at all well,’ I whispered to Mrs. Fairborn ; ‘ shall I take her home ? ’

‘ Yes,’ answered Mrs. Fairborn, snappishly. Mr. Fairborn was looking askance at us, with a gaze of angry reproof at our colloquy. Wedged as we were at the extremity of the pew, the unpleasant ordeal of having to squeeze past Mr. and Mrs. Fairborn presented itself. However, I rose resolutely, and taking Bessie by the hand, pushed my way out, Mr. Fairborn not condescending to enquire the reason of his being inconvenienced, but eyeing us as we passed with a look of distrust and irritation.

It is not pleasant to walk down a densely populated aisle ; the congregation inspect you as if you were a criminal being led forth to execution ; and you are pursued by the unpleasant feeling that the clergyman thinks you are leaving only to escape his sermon. Why, I

ask, should the slightest movement in church provoke such eager stares? are the people so *ennuy   * as to be delighted at any incident that offers them a brief distraction?

With my eyes lowered I hurried through the church, and with a sigh of relief gained the open air.

‘How do you feel now, Bessie?’ I enquired.

‘Very sick and dizzy,’ she answered, holding her hand over her eyes to protect them from the strong midday glare.

I took her arm to support her, for the child trod unsteadily; we walked down the gravel path and got outside the railing. Just then I heard the crunching of a man’s tread; I turned and saw Dr. Monck following us. I did not pause, but he soon gained my side.

‘Good morning, Miss Howard.’

‘Good morning, Dr. Monck.’

‘Miss Bessie is sickening for an illness,’ he said in an under tone, glancing at the child; ‘I noticed her as she passed down the church. Scarlatina probably; it is a good deal about.’

‘I suspected something of the kind,’ I answered.

‘You are wise to bring her out of church. Here are premonitory symptoms that may indicate something mild; but had you kept her through Thornton’s sermon, it would be hard to pronounce what the malady might not have proved.’ He uttered one of his frank, cordial laughs.

‘I thought you did not attend St. Matthew’s?’

‘Nor do I as a rule. Here, Bessie, take my arm—I must divide the ladies.’ He came between us, withdrawing from my arm the child’s hand and taking it. ‘Now,’ he said aside, ‘we can talk of Thornton without fear of old Fairborn being told of our ungodly criticism. You must let me see you home and help to make Bessie comfortable before the rest return.’

‘I did not see you at church.’

‘I dare say not. I sat near the door, within easy reach of the air should one of Thornton’s hot blasts threaten suffocation. But had I sat next to you I doubt if you would have seen



me. My eye was upon you, though, all the time. Such staidness, such demureness—you are a saint. “Nymph,” I might have said, “in thy orisons be my sins remembered.”

‘I am not so attentive as you are pleased to think. But Mr. Fairborn’s eye is upon me, and he holds me devout as any penitent before her confessor. If I had my choice of church I would not go to St. Matthew’s. It is too noisy and new; there is no odour of sanctity, but an aroma of Sunday clothes and hair-oil. Besides, Mr. Thornton frightens me.’

‘That I can believe.’

‘He removes all hope of redemption; buries the light of heaven beneath the Tartarean fumes of his Inferno. Listening to him I feel myself so dreadfully wicked, so irreclaimably bad, that were I a religious maniac, and could believe life to be so vicious and God so merciless as he affirms them, I should apply to the nearest chemist for a small bottle labelled Poison.’

‘So should I; but instead of taking it myself, I should send it over to Thornton with this

note:—"Reverend Sir,—It is my business to minister to the body as it is yours to minister to the soul. Pray swallow this, as this dose on your system will correspond in its effect with your doses on my soul." Well, Bessie, how are you now?'

'I feel better,' said Bessie.

'The air will keep you up.'

We had been walking pretty rapidly, and had now gained the Lechmere Road. Though I had not met Dr. Monck's eyes, I was aware that he had been taking sundry side-peeps at me. I looked at him at last, and caught him in the act of a pretty steady stare.

'Do you know,' he said, 'that your health seems to have improved vastly since you have been at the Abbey? When I met you first, you were as pale as a lily. Health is a true artist, isn't it? What becoming light it gives to the eyes! what a lovely tint to the complexion!'

'That depends upon what materials it has to work upon,' I answered coquettishly.

He laughed ; a compliment faltered and died on his lips. He probably remembered my reprimand.

‘ You must find it very dull at the Abbey, though, don’t you ? ’

‘ Hush ! ’ I exclaimed, with a glance at Bessie.

‘ She can’t hear.’

‘ I am not so dull as you think.’

‘ Oh ! ’ he exclaimed drily ; ‘ is Miss Howard one of those young ladies who want to make people think that they regard it as a delightful task to teach the young idea how to shoot ? ’

‘ You are mistaken. Miss Howard is just one of those young ladies who very carefully try to prevent people from believing what they do not believe themselves.’

He fixed his eyes upon me, and then burst out :

‘ What an expressionless thing a profile is ! I wish I could have seen your full face as you said that.’

‘Why?’

‘I should have liked to see what else you meant.’

‘Pray don’t accredit me with more than I have. Enthusiastic or suspicious people are apt to make that mistake. They will develope a small talent into a full-blown genius, or build a perfect tower of meaning upon an innocent and unsuggestive glance.’

‘Well, I confess myself both enthusiastic and suspicious.’

‘Just now,’ I said, ‘you thought I must be dull at the Abbey. If you think that, you are mistaken; I walk in a perpetual round of excitement.’

‘What is the round, the three R’s?’

‘And an L.’

‘I understand—Mr. Fairborn lectures you.’

‘Mr. Fairborn does nothing of the kind; L stands for love as well as lecturing.’

‘In the name of Heaven, Miss Howard, what *do* you mean?’ he demanded impatiently.

‘Here we are,’ I exclaimed, pushing open the

great iron gate. 'Bessie, give me your hand; Dr. Monck must be tired.'

He relinquished her without a word. I looked at him; a moody expression had crept into his clear gray eyes, and his under-lip was pursed like a spoilt child's. We marched through the garden in silence; but before mounting the steps he approached me close, and in a strong whisper said:

'Are you a flirt?'

I ought to have looked annoyed, drawn myself erect, and stiffly turned from him. Instead of this I laughed; there was something perfectly funny in the way he put this question.

'I will answer your question when we have got Bessie to bed.'

'It may be too late then; the others will have returned.'

'You shall hear in time.'

'But I am dying for an explanation.'

'Then you must die if you cannot live for half an hour longer.'

Once inside the house, Dr. Monck's light manner wore off; masking himself in his professional gravity, he proceeded to give me instructions. I was to get Bessie to bed; meanwhile, he would remain below until I should summon him. I knew there was little need for him to remain; for no symptoms had as yet pronounced themselves, and of course he could do nothing. To suggest this, however, would be to deprive myself of a pleasure. I will not deny that his presence gave me great gladness. What the sun is to the flower, the light to the imprisoned, was he to me. I knew that I ought not to have felt this, I knew that I was acting insanely to aid the growth of such thoughts; but already the tyranny of love was beginning to make itself felt; it warmed my heart to receive the clear impression of his face—it forced my eyes to keep their gaze on him—it animated fancy into soft thrilling dreams. The enchantment was upon me; I could not dissolve it. The spell had wrought: I could not burst my splendid fetters.

And I had found too the way of silencing my self-reproaches. If we had met, I was not the seeker. Could I fly from him when he approached me? Could I deign no answer when he accosted me? Fate was the culprit, not I. By accident we had met, by accident we had conversed, by accident I was beginning to love.

To love! 'Fool!' cried my tormented reason; 'need love be the consequence of fate's ordinations? Are you then so little mistress of yourself that you cannot strangle each emotion as it is born, stubbornly repel the soft persuasion of your fancy, consider him only as the mere stranger whom an inexorable law commands and condemns you never to marry, and therefore never to think of?'

Ay, cool logician! sound pleader where the passions are not concerned; grave counsellor where the heart is not your opponent! If life were statutory, if we were bound to abide by the decisions of an inflexible code of laws, then would your promptings be easily obeyed. But

how often does your frosty logic avail against the fiery rhetoric of the passions? against the suave solicitations of hope, the sparkling accents of fancy, the hot rebellious eloquence of love!

Lost in thought, my actions became mechanical. Fortunately there was little to be done that needed close attention. Bessie was soon undressed and in bed, and I descended to fetch Dr. Monck. He was in the drawing-room, radiant in the crimson glare of the sunshine through the curtains.

‘Bessie is in bed,’ I said. ‘Will you come to her?’

‘Presently. You have to give me an explanation. I do not stir from this room until I receive it.’

‘But the child is waiting for you.’

‘The child is very well. I can do nothing for her yet. By and by I will go through the formality of feeling her pulse. Don’t misunderstand me—I do not stop for her: to-morrow she may need advice—I stop for you.’



I was silent.

‘We shall not be interrupted here,’ he went on. ‘What is more, we command a view of the garden, and need not fear the abrupt intrusion of the master of the house, whose tread is cat-like.’

Then after a little,

‘Give me the promised explanation.’

‘Of what?’ I asked perversely.

‘You spoke of love as forming a portion of your excitement here.’

‘Well?’

‘Is there anybody making love to you?’

He spoke eagerly. A few sentences would have told him what I had to say; but I was in a tormenting mood. His trouble was soft and sweet; it amused my humour to play with it, as in some moods we find pleasure in breaking the petals of a flower.

‘Somebody has been making love to me.’

He tried to guess who it might be. He soon gave it up.

‘Tell me.’

‘Not only have I been made love to,’ I went on, ‘but I have even had a proposal of marriage offered to me.’

His lips tightened; he eyed me in a strange manner. Then said,

‘Why not? you are young—you are beautiful—you are possessed of fascinating qualities——’

‘Dr. Monck!’ I exclaimed, turning my head away, whilst my heart throbbed as if it would bound from my breast.

He walked to the window abruptly: stood before it a few moments and then returned. I was thankful for the pause. It gave me time to subdue the agitation his language had excited.

‘You must know,’ he said, with a poor attempt to smile, ‘that the faculty of curiosity is more fully developed in me than in any old grandmother in the world. When aroused, its pangs are really acute as any physical pain. Will you compassionate my sufferings?’

‘You must expect to hear no story of pas-

sionate vows, of melting embraces, of thrilling glances.'

'I shall expect to hear the truth.'

'No story of a handsome lover—a realisation of some Rosa-Matildaish hero, fine-eyed, broad-browed, deep-chested, with a mouth promising nectar though yielding only small beer——'

'Pray go on.'

'No dainty romance of a maiden, coy, pining, sentimental, with thoughts fit only to be written on scented paper embossed with cupids nestling amid flowers.'

'Miss Howard, proceed.'

'My lover is short.'

He nodded.

'He is fat; when he laughs he seems to ripple in oily undulations from his cheeks to his boots.'

He made a gesture of impatience.

'His mind is not cultured—his language is susceptible of tuition. Nevertheless, he is capable of lubricating the way to love with a kind of greasy courtesy which he would find

serviceable in his attack on those who like to have the way to the altar sloped for them.'

'Now, Miss Howard, who is this lover of yours?'

'Do you know Mr. Gumbles?'

'The footman? the fellow who bolted with Fairborn's plate? of course. Well?'

'Well,' I said demurely, 'Gumbles is my lover.'

'Your lover!'

'Yes, and Gumbles wanted to be my husband.'

'Miss Howard, you are joking. You are disguising the truth in a quaint parable.'

'I assure you, Dr. Monck, it is the truth. I can even show you—for they are doubtless to be found—the two tracts he gave me, by which he probably hoped I should educate myself into a proper appreciation of his love.'

'You are really in earnest? this is the truth?'

'I am really in earnest.'

He opened wide his gray eyes.

'The impudent vagabond!' he began.

‘Now, Dr. Monck, my explanation being given, will you come to Bessie?’

‘The miserable old snorer!’ he went on, ‘Did anybody kick him? did you push him head-over-heels down stairs? did you take aim at his flabby visage with the ink-bottle?’

‘Mr. Fairborn saved me that trouble. He entered at the very nick of time when my lover still knelt at my feet: stormed at him in vigorous language, and went flying with him out of the room.’

‘And the fellow revenged himself by running off with Fairborn’s plate! ha! ha! ha!’

‘Yes, and left his tracts behind him!’

‘Oh dear!’ The full absurdity of the incident flashed upon him; he shouted with laughter.

‘Enjoy your laugh,’ I said, ‘but at least applaud the courage that has enabled me to make so very humbling a confession. And now, Dr. Monck, remember Bessie is waiting for you.’

‘Bessie must wait,’ he answered, recovering

his gravity with an effort. 'I like this room. I like your society. I mean to stop here.'

He placed a chair for me, saying, 'Sit ; I'll mount guard.'

The order was peremptory. I obeyed, hardly knowing what I did. He came and stood before me.

'Miss Howard,' he began ; 'the life you are leading is unendurable.'

'How do you mean ?'

'You were not born to be a governess. You are out of place in this house : a violet in a bed of nettles ; a lamb among pigs.'

'Thanks.'

'Is there any chance of your leaving here, do you think ?'

'I cannot say. Life is so full of the unexpected, that I may be out of the house before to-morrow. As matters stand, the probability is I may continue here for a long time yet.'

He moved away, stared through the window and returned.

‘Do you remember the promise you made me when I met you in the wood?’

‘Yes.’

He smiled. ‘I am glad to see you remember it. Your eyes are like an April day, full of shower and shine, showing a nature apt to be capricious.’

‘Do you know that politeness does not admit of personalities in conversation?’

‘But memory,’ he went on, ‘is of no value unless it serves as an impulse. Will your recollection of what I said prompt you to act upon it?’

‘I have promised once: you must think me very faithless to be so exacting.’

‘Are you faithless?’ he asked, bending and looking into my eyes.

‘Just now,’ I answered, ‘you asked me if I was a flirt. Now you enquire if I am faithless? To these questions it is not likely I should answer yes. Are *you* faithless?’

‘You told me my character the other night. You pronounced me loyal.’

‘The eyes and the heart are sometimes at variance.’

‘I am not faithless,’ he answered. ‘I am warm—true—but not passionate, unless great earnestness be passion.’

‘But you are suspicious?’

‘In rare instances. I am suspicious before I take some important step—important to myself I mean. That is, I send out curiosity and imagination, as the Prussians send out their Uhlans, to warn me if all be not right. But when I have acted I become the most confident of men. I am disposed to be garrulous and egotistical just now; cross-examine me, Miss Howard.’

‘I have no more questions to ask, Dr. Monck.’

Then I added after a little pause,

‘Are you not in the habit of accompanying Lady Monck to church?’

‘Sometimes—pretty regularly, I should say. All Saints’ is our church, you know. My mother’s family only dropped Catholicism



amongst them two generations ago. The flavour still clings—the tradition feebly prompts. So she prefers smooth-faced High Church, with its intoning and its genuflexions, to bearded Low Church, with its sober accents and hearty clerks.'

'Will your mother not wonder at your absence from her side this morning?'

'She *may* wonder,' he said brusquely.

'Miss Lepell, I presume, attends the same church——'

'You *may* presume,' he interrupted; 'she sits in our pew.'

'She will miss you.'

'What then?' he exclaimed, growing a little red in the face. 'I am not a lap-dog to follow two women, although one is my mother, with a tight-curved tail and a sneaking step. I gave up hoops, jackets, and bulls-eyes fifteen years ago; yet you talk to me as though I were still in the nursery.'

'Well, Dr. Monck,' I answered demurely, 'all this is nothing to me, in so far only as I

am likely to be the means of causing one of those scenes you dread at your house.'

'So that is the way you treat my confidence?' he said, breathing a little quickly, while his eyes sparkled. 'Having shown you my quiver, you take the first opportunity to steal one of my arrows and discharge it at me.' And he burst out with comical warmth,

'Keen are his pangs, but keener far to feel !  
He nursed the pinion that impelled the steel ;  
While the same plumage that had warm'd his nest  
Drank the last life-drop of his bleeding breast !'

'Am I really making you angry?' I enquired with a laugh in my eyes.

'I hate to be twitted with Miss Lepell,' he said. 'She is no more to me than the laundress who gets up my linen—not so much, for she is not so useful.'

'And this is the way you speak of the lady you intend to marry?'

'Marry? yes,' he answered, tightening his lips. 'I will marry her—at the Millennium, when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb.'

will marry her on the day that the Pope's toe is kissed in St. Paul's; or when the Jews' Messiah shall have rebuilt Jerusalem and handed it over to the posterity of the men whom the money-lenders have swindled.' Then in a sudden passionate way, 'Why do you vex me?'

'If I have done so I am very sorry.'

'Sorry!' he exclaimed whilst a smile relaxed his mouth; 'there is no sorrow in your blue eyes, but mischief, and laughter, and beauty, and fascination.'

There was passion in his voice, love in his eyes. 'I must break this spell,' I said to myself, 'before I am helplessly subdued by it.' Rising, I exclaimed,

'Hush! I think I hear steps.'

I stole to the window and looked out. Though I had really heard nothing, yet there was Mr. Fairborn at the gate.

'Here they are!' I cried, and scampered like a hare from the room. He followed me.

When, a few minutes after, Mr. and Mrs.

Fairborn came upstairs they found me on one side of Bessie's bed, Dr. Monck on the other, holding her hand and questioning her with the professional gravity of a physician threescore years old.

## CHAPTER VIII.

DR. MONCK was right when he pronounced Bessie sickening for scarlatina. The symptoms declared themselves next day; but the malady promised a mild form, necessitating only ordinary attention. The two children occupied one room; but for fear of contagion Charlotte's bed was brought upstairs, and she became my companion.

Mrs. Fairborn nursed the patient; and, for the first time since I had known her, something akin to a woman's nature broke through the icy shroud of her character. I was not permitted free access to the room for fear of spreading the illness; but when once or twice I had occasion to enter, I marked the change that had been wrought in Mrs. Fairborn's face—the

solicitude, the sadness, the hunger that had entered it. Noiseless in her movements, prompt and precise in her actions, she made an excellent nurse; and as I watched her careful tending of her child, the gentle hand with which she smoothed the pillow, the soft tone with which she coaxed her into taking food or medicine, I found a growing interest springing up in me for her. It made me feel sure, this ministration, that it was the nipping atmosphere of her life, the sharp blight of her painful position, that had given her that steely front, that had hardened her qualities and stiffened the blood in her veins. Transplanted to some sunny sphere, flowers, I felt sure, might yet spring from the soil made barren by the piercing breath that had so long and so ruthlessly played over it.

Mr. Fairborn, with a sincere horror of illness, held steadily aloof from his child. His cowardice was almost comical. He would not allow his wife to come near him; and one servant only he permitted to attend on him, the

servant he had peremptorily ordered not to answer the summons of the sick room.

Very shortly after Bessie had been taken ill, he had entered the schoolroom where I was going through the usual morning's lessons with Charlotte. He advanced to me with his long swinging stride, approached close, and exclaimed,

'I hope, Miss Howard, you never go to see Bessie?'

'Sometimes I do, sir,' I answered.

'I desire that you will not. I very emphatically request that you will not.'

'If I do,' I said, 'I shall take great care to remember your apprehension and to avoid you.'

'Why,' he exclaimed, 'that's the very thing I want to guard you against. I don't want to be deprived of your society.'

I thanked him, I am afraid, rather ironically for his condescension. More literal, however, than one of Charles Lamb's Scotchmen, he was quite impervious to implication, sweet or sour.

He took one at one's word and could not see an inch beyond it.

'I dislike solitude,' he continued. 'It pleases me to have some one with me at my table. I take pleasure in your society, and must insist that you will avoid taking a step that will be likely to deprive me of your company.'

To this I could make no reply but a bow, resolved however not to mind him, but to visit Bessie or not as it pleased me. As Mrs. Fairborn occupied the next room, and as he knew she had keen ears, he did not prolong his visit. I had noticed that he had rarely cared to engage in any lengthened conversation with me when his wife was within hearing distance.

You might perhaps like to know whether Gumbles' confession had effected any change in Mr. Fairborn's canting manner. You would naturally suppose that the mask having been torn from his face, he would take no further trouble to resume it again. A circumstance presently to be related will explain to you why Gumbles' disclosure gave him so little concern.



But for this circumstance, I should have believed that the very careful way in which I had conducted myself towards Mrs. Fairborn, my extreme solicitude to suppress the faintest indications of my knowledge—for suspicion it was not—of the position she occupied, had convinced Mr. Fairborn that I really discredited Gumbles' assertion. He certainly canted as much as ever; but this, as I have before said, must have been an hereditary malady. I have no doubt that he would have used the same metallic monotone, the same queer phrases, the same Scriptural allusion in a full and free confession of his own iniquities. I will not pursue this subject, however, but let the story develop itself.

Dr. Monck called twice a day for about a week; I did not see him; his visits were made in the morning when I was busy in the school-room, or in the afternoon when I was out with Charlotte.

I wished to see him, although I knew that my wish was wicked and insane. My thoughts

were incessantly occupied with him; they distressed me. Instead of attending to Charlotte, I would find myself standing at the window peering down into the garden in the hope of seeing him pass. Every afternoon, when I returned from my walk, I would enter the house with a beating heart, wishing, fearing to encounter him. Speech I did not need from him; one glance of his calm sweet eyes, one pressure of his hand, would have fed my craving, and have filled me with abounding joy.

Yes, I loved him now; I could hide from myself the truth no longer. The discovery burnt my cheek with a stinging blush; it brought pain and bliss; it limned happiness upon a background of terror; it filled my nights with dreams which kept me in alternate smiles and tears.

A strange thought came into my head one day; soon as it sprang it became a passion, a hunger. I was seized with a longing to hear tidings of John Graham. Had he left the

country? Was he still at the cottage? *Was he dead?*

I was in my bedroom when the wish took me; in the excess of the agitation it induced, I began to pace the floor, an old habit of mine when distracted by thought. Giving shape to my wish, I tortured my mind for the means to gratify it. Upon the answer to the question rested my whole future of joy or woe—of love or despair.

Presently an idea dawned; it brightened; it orbbed itself upon my mind darkened by helplessness. I would write to Lichendale giving a fictitious name. I would represent myself as a servant who had not received her full wages from Mr. Graham, and who, having addressed letters to the cottage in vain, now sought information of him at Lichendale. To whom should I write? I mused. Not to the tradespeople; they might not be able to reply. To the postmaster? Yes. He would do. Detection became less a contingency by addressing him than by addressing anyone else. Still the

venture was a bold one; it might establish a clue; it might lead to my discovery. What should I do? Rapidly I paced the room; actively my brain worked. I resolved ere long; I would write—I would risk the consequences.

I descended to the schoolroom, took a sheet of paper, and disguising my hand, misspelling words, thus wrote:—

‘Martha James respeckfull complements to the post master martha was a servint in Mr. John graham’s cottage and was Dismissed being owed six Months wages. mrs. James complements and having Written to mr John Graham and had no anser, wishes if mr postmaster will tell her if mr graham is still living at heath Cottage and if not if the postmaster knows Where he is stamps and adressed Envelop inside with respeckfull complements.’

Having achieved this performance, I rewrote it, taking care to adjust the punctuation and deform the spelling to the last limits of intelligibility. I then addressed the envelope to

Mrs. Martha James, Post-office, Huddleston. I mused a little now. Should I post it at once? or should I pass the night and examine my resolution in the morning? My wish would suffer no delay. I repaired once more to my bedroom, equipped myself in hat and cloak and left the house. The post-office was hardly a ten minutes' walk; and I had soon gained it, posted my letter and returned.

On the following afternoon I went out as usual with Charlotte. A heavy shower had fallen in the morning, leaving the air cool and inviting. The only place during these excursions I had ever met Dr. Monck in was the wood; thither I directed my steps. The wish to meet him made me feel like a guilty thing as I walked along; yet I could not forego the gladness which an interview with him would impart to my spirit, saddened and sunk by the interval that had separated us. In the green shadow of that wood nature lay fresh and sweet. The sun had not ravished the pearls that bowed and beautified each leaf of grass; the

rabbits frisked through the rich green growth, flinging a million crystals in their graceless bounds. The pathway through the wood was dry, and I followed it a long way, soothed by the serious calm of the place, refreshed by the moist sweet air, made aromatic by the faintest perfume of decaying summer. We came presently to a path branching off from that we pursued. Here a fallen tree, lying dead and gaunt, black-branched, and partly moss-grown, offered a seat. Through the opening in the trees, the landscape reaching to the sky lay hot and shining, a clear outline of sweep and swell, crimsoned here and there with toy-like villages. Here I was certain of meeting all who chose to take the cut through the wood to Huddleston; here, should Dr. Monck pass, I was sure to see him.

My hope was doomed to be disappointed. He did not come. I had no right, indeed, to expect him, for the call that had brought him that way before might not again be given. Still, I had placed my confidence in chance, and

her betrayal irritated me. An hour I lingered, Charlotte grew impatient. Forced to return at last, I reluctantly rose, and lingeringly retraced our path.

I was not in the choicest of moods when I reached the Abbey. Mounting to my bedroom, I removed my things, and began to indulge myself in the foolish amusement of thinking. Perhaps half an hour thus passed, when a rap at the door caused me to cry 'Come in.' A maid-servant appeared.

'If you please, master is in the parlour and wishes to see you.'

'I will be down at once,' I answered. The servant withdrew.

What now? some commission to execute, some lecture on the subject of the children to receive. On descending I met Mrs. Fairborn in the gallery. I had not seen her for two days, and it struck me that she was looking thinner and paler than usual. Pale, indeed, she always was, but this was the colourlessness of illness or fatigue.

‘I hope Bessie is better,’ I said.

‘Much,’ was the answer.

‘I am afraid you are fatiguing yourself by your long vigils, Mrs. Fairborn ; you have been too anxious. I wish you would let me relieve you in your guard occasionally.’

‘There is no need,’ she answered. ‘Bessie is well enough to leave her room. If Mr. Fairborn were not so timid, I should be glad for her to descend to the parlour. Are you doing anything just now?’

‘I am going to Mr. Fairborn ; he has sent for me. But I do not suppose he has anything particular to say.’

‘I only wanted you to stop with Bessie whilst I went into my bedroom ; but since Mr. Fairborn has sent for you, go.’

‘I can remain,’ I said.

‘You had better go,’ she remarked quietly. ‘Have you any idea what Mr. Fairborn wants?’

‘No idea whatever.’

She signed to me to leave ; I went down—



stairs; she entered the bedroom. The parlour door was ajar. I found Mr. Fairborn seated at the table with a desk before him. His glass was out of his eye, but he inserted it to examine me as I entered. He then brought a chair pretty close to his own, and told me to be seated.

‘How long have you been with us, Miss Howard?’ he asked, resuming his place.

‘Six weeks I think,’ I replied.

‘My usual habit,’ he said, ‘has been to pay my governesses by the quarter. But I have judged you might be in want of money; and as money is always acceptable, I thought you might find it convenient were I to pay you for your services now.’

His eyes, as I examined them, looked hot and bleary: his face was flushed, and I was sensible of an aroma resembling port wine. He put his hand in his pocket, produced a purse, extracted five sovereigns, and whilst he held them said:

‘Your salary, I believe, is 40/.’

‘It is.’

‘A month’s salary, then, would be three pounds six shillings and eightpence. The half of that is one pound thirteen shillings and fourpence, which, I think, added together will make five pounds.’

I slipped the gold in my purse, thanking him. There is something in the sight and sound of the first money you have earned that appeals direct to the heart, softens the temper, gives life a pleasant colouring, and imparts a strong sense of self-importance. The first money paid you is, I think, the *only* poem you will find in the dry, matter-of-fact volume of commerce.

He pushed his desk from him, looked at the door, which was ajar ; brought his chair a little nearer to mine and stared at me. I was about to rise, not liking his expression.

‘Pray sit still,’ he said. ‘I have something to say to you.’

Embarrassed by his stare, I fixed my gaze on my lap.

‘Do you know, Miss Howard,’ thrusting his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets, ‘that I am a very miserable man?’

I held my tongue.

‘As miserable a man,’ he went on, ‘as you might find between this and Leeds. Of course you are surprised to hear me say this. I should be very much surprised myself were I in your place. You have difficulty—and so should I have difficulty were I you—in reconciling my statement with what you see around you. For you look about you and witness this handsome building and its spacious grounds, its costly furniture, its liberal complement of servants; in short, all the signs and symbols of opulence; and you naturally ask, Can that man be miserable who owns all these things? Unfortunately,’ and here he heaved a sigh full of port wine, ‘I am compelled to answer, Yes: for a man has a heart as well as a soul: and though religion—my consolation, Miss Howard, for without religion what would man be? a worm, a beast, an insect—though religion, I say

may minister to the one, it is only love that can enlighten and comfort the other. Now, Miss Howard, I am without love.'

I stirred uneasily in my chair; but still I held my tongue.

'I say I am without love,' he continued. 'You shall judge. As Dalilah inveigled Samson by shearing him of his hair while asleep, so I, when in the slumber of innocence, was shorn of my judgment by the wanton hand of a woman. She met me. Taking advantage of my inexperience, she misled me. Pitying her degradation, I made her the mistress of my home and the companion of my heart.'

A dead pause and a long silence.

'I did not marry her,' he abruptly burst out. 'Gumbles spoke the truth, though Gumbles is a villain. The *mésalliance* was unblessed. What is born of the world cannot prosper. From the soil, which religion the great husbandman does not tend, weeds will spring—brambles and nettles to sting and tear. I have been stung—I have been torn.'

Another dead pause and another long silence.

‘When I look about me,’ he commenced again, bringing his chair an inch or so nearer to mine, and filling me with a strong temptation to immediate flight: ‘I say, when I look about me and survey mankind, I find happy faces, and I find miserable faces. And when I enquire what causes produced this happiness and this misery, what do I hear? I hear that the miserable faces belong to the unloved, and the happy faces to those who are loved. Miss Howard, you have keen eyes; oblige me by examining my face.’

I raised my eyes to the moist, blank circumference, marking the vague points of wet light eyes, lips red and dry as the walls of his own house, and a short seal-like forehead running abruptly into a red furze of hair.

‘What do you see?’ he asked.

I lowered my eyes, moving uncomfortably on my chair and wholly ignorant of what reply to make.

‘I will tell you what you see,’ he said. ‘You see a countenance expressive of misery. I applaud the sensibility that prohibits you, Miss Howard, from avowing the painful discovery. And now enquire the cause of this misery, and you will learn that I am not loved. Nay, I will go further, and say that I do not love. Alas! let me be candid and declare that in one point the most unchristian sentiments are mine. I am allied to a bad-tempered woman—a woman displeasing to the eye and unsatisfactory to the spirit. But I have made up my mind to have no more of it. I mean to cut it. I hate this woman, and she hates me. I’ll give her a retiring pension, clear my soul of all the cant of association, and settle in Italy.’

‘But you will be acting very unjustly, sir,’ I said, violently restraining a disposition to laugh at his queer language and queer grimaces, and sensible withal of a strong glow of disgust.

‘To myself? Perhaps. And yet no—I have told you the wrench will not be great. Time

has rendered the link that connects Charity and me very attenuated—almost worn it out. It will need no heavy blow to break it; and that blow, Miss Howard, you shall give.'

'I!' I exclaimed, driving my chair with a violent recoil several paces.

He got up; and, mindless of my ineffectual struggles, had grasped me by the hand and was about to speak, when the door opened and Mrs. Fairborn came in. She could hardly have chosen a better moment; for assuredly the situation was striking enough. There I stood, or rather swayed, white as a sheet, with my eyes dilated by terror, with my mouth pursed up in an expression of fright and pain, for he grasped me with a strong and torturing clutch. And there he stood, with his moist eyes aglow, his red lips slobbering, his heavy cheeks hanging loose, the picture of a gorilla bent on the death of a human victim.

'Save me! take me from him!' I cried.

He relinquished me at once, turning savagely towards her. Rendered faint by fear, I burst

into tears, and moved, amid uncontrollable sobs, to the door.

Erect, daring, almost haughty, Mrs. Fairborn reared herself before her bad companion. Her complexion was stone-white; a steely light deepened the complexion of her eyes; her lips were firm; but her nostrils dilated and quivered, and her hands convulsively opened and shut.

‘One moment, Miss Howard,’ she exclaimed, arresting me by a commanding gesture of the arm. ‘You have heard *his* lies of me—you must now hear the truth.’

‘Leave this room!’ he roared to her. ‘You bold, impudent woman! This is not your house—I command here.’

‘He has told you,’ she continued, unmoved as a statue, ‘that it was I who inveigled him. If there be a just God in heaven, He will record that miserable lie and adjudge him for it. It was he who betrayed me; it was he who, masked by a religion made hateful by his association with it, appealed to me, soothed, flattered, vowed, and misled me by oaths which



by God's eternal laws of justice and truth ought to be made binding upon him.'

'Be off!' he shouted again.

'He betrayed me. Fearing the scorn, the contempt of the world, which he had sought to humbug by assuming the aspect of an honest man, he has kept me as you see, clothed me, reared my helpless children, as you see—but acted towards me as only the Almighty has seen. This heart' (striking her breast), 'made for love and tenderness, he has changed to stone; my blood has turned sour under his baleful glance. He has broken down my spirits and filled my poor life with blackness, under the pressure of a tyranny, vague and nameless, but sharp and certain as the horror of a long long nightmare! I have heard your insults—I have heard your language!' she cried, turning to him as he stood there swaying his burly form, and menacing her with his outstretched arm; 'but those insults are light, that language is mild, compared to the things you have said and done to me in secret! Miss Howard, if there is a

wholly bad man on earth, lustful, ravening, hypocritical, without pity, without charity, without honour, he stands there! . . . Now go.'

She pointed at him full. Her head thrown back, her bosom arched, her eyes gleaming, her face hueless, her mouth set, her whole attitude rigid, her whole being informed by the powerful sense of long years of wrong and suffering, she looked almost grand. Transfigured by passion, she might have been some strange messenger from another world, avenging the injuries of the broken-hearted woman in this. Though my eyes were dim with tears they took in her tragic shape as she stood there in the dignity of her scorn, and with a feeling akin to awe I crept from the room.

Gaining my bedroom, I closed and locked the door. I became sensible of an emotion resembling the terror that John Graham used to inspire. That bad man downstairs might follow me; influenced by wine, excited by passion, he might attempt some violence. To get out of

the house as rapidly as I might was now my serious business. Dragging my box from beneath the bed, I began to pack it, throwing article upon article in with little concern as to what appearance they might present on their withdrawal. The trunk being filled, I corded it; then put on my bonnet and a light shawl, opened the door and went downstairs. I met Marsh in the gallery.

‘I have left my box in my room,’ I said, ‘ready packed and strapped. When I send some one for it, will you kindly let me have it?’

‘You are never going, miss?’

‘Yes, I am.’

‘Well for sure!’ she exclaimed. ‘Not that I’m surprised. This is a curious house, and the Fairborns is curious folk. *I* mean to give notice next Thursday. There’s too much religion here; nothin’ but bein’ wicked an’ repentin’ goes on here from mornin’ till night. Master fills the house with hypocrites. Ever since Gumbles has gone, cook’s taken to swear horrible.’

‘Well, good-bye, Marsh,’ I said; ‘I hope you’ll be more comfortable in your next place. You won’t forget about my box?’

‘I’ll remember,’ she answered. ‘Good-bye, miss; I’m sorry you’re going.’

I left her, and marching through the hall on tiptoe, gained the door. I should have liked to say farewell to the two girls, but I did not wish to prolong my stay in that house a minute beyond what I could help. The parlour door was closed as I passed, but through it I could hear the sounds of voices; Mrs. Fairborn’s subdued hard accents meeting the monotone of Mr. Fairborn which sometimes broke into a roar. Stealthily drawing the latch, I swung the hall door open and went out, leaving it ajar, lest the noise of closing it should draw their attention to me. Hurriedly winding my way down the gravel walk, I gained the road, and walked away with something of the speed with which I had fled from Jortin.

The clock in the tower of All Saints’ Church was striking five as I gained the High Street.

‘Our loving couple’s *tête-à-tête*,’ I thought, ‘has by this time been disturbed by the entry of the servant to prepare for dinner. If Mr. Fairborn has not seen me leave the house, he is probably asking for me, and Marsh is telling him with irritating composure that I am gone.’

Though the incidents that had followed each other so rapidly extended in reality over a very short space of time, they seemed to have had my whole lifetime for their occupation; and like the Wandering Jew, I appeared fated to find no resting-place. An inexorable destiny was crying ‘On! on!’ What was the black future holding for me? was I to perish at last like some stray cur, or die miserably in some house of refuge? It has been the fate of many to meet in life with trials sorer than mine; but upon few, I hope, has descended so icy a weight of hopelessness, so heavy a shadow of misery, blotting life from the soul and crushing energy in the heart, as it was mine to experience that afternoon. Bitter and cruel it seemed, that fate

should have selected for its victim one so young, so delicate, so inexperienced, so little capable of coping with the great world as I.

My destination was my old lodgings. Theodore Street was soon gained ; I mounted the steps and appealed with the knocker. The door was opened by Mrs. Shaw ; she started on seeing me.

‘ Goodness, miss ! is it really you ! dear me ! come in—why, how pale you look ; you’ve bin cryin’.’

‘ I have come to occupy your rooms again for a short time,’ I said, as I followed her into the familiar little sitting-room.

‘ An’ have you left your situation, miss ?’

‘ Yes. I have not so much left it as I have been driven from it.’

I threw myself into an armchair, and overcome by my feelings burst into tears. Mrs. Shaw watched me a little in silence, then left the room to give me, I suppose, an opportunity of recovering myself. The room was as I had left it ; scrupulously clean, with the chairs

disposed as I remembered them, and the pile of books lent me by Mrs. Shaw on the first night of my arrival standing in the little cupboard recess near the chimney. The card was in the window ; through the clean panes I saw the houses into whose rooms I had often gazed in my long fits of reverie.

Ah, I thought, in this little asylum I could be happy had I but the means to continue it. I would care for nothing better than this cosy little parlour, and the snug, white, crisp bedroom annexed to it ; waited on by good Mrs. Shaw, and safe from insult, freed from the cramping sense of subordination, and secure from the pursuit of John Graham.

Meanwhile, I had heard the clatter of crockery below ; soon Mrs. Shaw appeared with a steaming cup of tea and a plate of dainty slices of brown bread and fresh butter.

‘ Drink that, dear heart,’ she said in her kind way, placing the tray near me. ‘ Let me take your bonnet ; you’ll soon be all right ; you must bear up. When you’ve taken your tea you

shall tell me all that's happened. I can guess summat—for I've Mrs. Trundle's caution in my mind, and somehow reckoned you would not stay long with Mr. Fairborn.'

I did as she bade me ; I drank the refreshing draught and ate a little of the bread and butter. Then getting her to sit down, I commenced the story of my sojourn at the Abbey. She heard me out with deep interest, and when I concluded, remarked :

' Well, if I don't revenge yer by telling Mrs. Trundle your story, and settin' her to gossip of that man's wickedness and the poor creature he's deceived all over the town and as far as ever her tongue 'll reach—an' it carries far, does her tongue—may I be turned out o' this house this minute ! To think of his sinfulness—an' him a religious man, too ! Well, we live in a queer world. I used often to say to Shaw, " Heart ! " I'd say, " there's not a man on this airth I'd trust out o' my sight. You're all like owls, a blinkin' an' lookin' innocent as



babes unborn i' the daylight, but soon nor ever the night comes and no mortal eye's a rest-in' on you, you set to screeching and frightening honest folk, and a flyin' about the Lord only knows where."

## CHAPTER IX.

THAT evening Mrs. Shaw and I had a long talk about my prospects. She seemed to think there was little chance of my finding another place as governess in Huddleston; and as I had frankly stated to her the sum of money I possessed, she perceived that there would be little use in recommending me to seek fortune elsewhere.

‘Well,’ she exclaimed meditatively, ‘it is to be sure uncommon hard for a young woman to get a livin’ now a days. I’m speakin’ of course of such young women as you are—ladies-born. As to people o’ my kind, if I had a darter as was hale and hearty, I’d just tie a apron to her, and turn her out a charin’, a laundrin’, or whatever else she might take a taste to. When Mrs. Trundle married, she told me she had

nothing more to commence life on than a bed-stidle and a washin' basin. People as spring from working folks can do much, you see; it's the poor ladies as poverty galls.'

'It is all a question of pride, I suppose,' I answered. 'For myself, however, I have no pride. I must work if I want to live. I know that if I can't get another place as governess, I must solicit work at the shops—serve behind the counter, like heaps of others are doing, many of them of as good a position as myself, I dare say.'

'Might you be anything of a needlewoman?'

'I can embroider, and that is all,' I replied, with a shrug at my helplessness.

'But you wouldn't like to go behind the counter—no,' she exclaimed, shaking her head at me. 'you'd rather be a lady's maid than that—I would. You'd not find it nice, miss, I can tell you, to be stared at by every man as came into the shop as if you was one of the articles put up for sale. And you don't know how cocky them shopmen are until you're among 'em. They're

very respectful and perlite to the ladies as come and lay out their money with them, smiling and bowing jest like one of them grinning toys on wires, which children jerk in their hands. But the girls they hire they turn on jest as if they was a row of them dolls called Aunt Sallys, cocked up behind the counter for the shopmen to throw sticks at. Tradesmen has very small souls, takin' 'em as a body.'

'No doubt,' I answered abstractedly.

'They like to revenge themselves upon others for the humblin' as is put on 'em by their customers. They are like vulgar gentry as have been sarvants themselves, who handle their sarvants jest as if they was negroes an' this not a free country. Don't think o' going behind the counter, miss; if the tradespeople get hold on yer they'll never stop a humblin' yer. A shopman is never so happy as when he has a real born lady or gen'man afore him so poor as he may insult 'em without fear o' losin' money.'

'But what am I to do, Mrs. Shaw?'

A pause, while she reflected; then she said,

‘Since you seem to take to teachin’, why wouldn’t you try to start a little school?’

‘Start a little school!’ I ejaculated, smiling at the utopianism of the idea.

‘Oh, I don’t mean for you to take a big house wi’ a big board across it, writ over with difficult words. What I say is, why not try to get a few little girls to teach here—in this very room? It’s big and pretty enough,’ she said, gazing complacently around her.

The proposition thus expressed seemed really feasible.

‘A good idea!’ I exclaimed; ‘at all events, there could be no harm trying it.’

‘No harm done if nothing comes on it,’ she added. ‘Just have a few cards printed, and send ’em about to likely folk. I’ll give some to Mrs. Trundle, and get her to drop ’em where she leaves the washin’. A couple o’ little gals at the beginning would pay you; and there’s no tellin’ where a thing means to end when once it’s started. That’s what Shaw said to me when he put his first crown i’ the savings’ bank. *That*

ended pretty soon though,' she added with a sigh; 'for he had to draw it after it had lain there three or four days for the rent.'

Mrs. Shaw's suggestion seemed really so practicable that I began at once to seriously meditate following it. I was the more inclined to favour her suggestions, since the advice she had before given me to apply to the registry office had met (in one sense) with success. Despair is superstitious; and I easily accredited the good soul with the power of bringing luck to me. We sat up until a pretty late hour discussing the scheme, and our conversation terminated by leaving me eager to set about it immediately. Want of money, by which was meant want of power to wait, would be the difficulty I should somehow have to surmount; but I foresaw that two or three pupils would supply me with means enough to continue until I should have acquired a larger number.

Do not think that I had forgotten the promise I had made to Dr. Monck to apply to him when I should be in want of help. That promise had

recurred to me as soon as the gates of the Abbey had closed upon me ; it had been present to my mind during my conversation with Mrs. Shaw. Love had nursed the recollection ; but pride had resolutely opposed its admission into my schemes.

Reconsidering, however, my determination in the long wakefulness of the night that followed, it seemed to me that, by taking it only in connection with the project I had in my mind, I could utilise it without in any degree impairing my dignity or paining my pride. It would be no extravagant tax upon his kindness, I thought, to ask him to procure me, if he could, one or two pupils from the numerous houses he attended. He would at least prove a useful advocate of my claims, for Mrs. Fairborn would hardly refuse me a testimonial ; and what she might choose to write he could enlarge upon and confirm.

The morning came ; drowsily I lingered in bed, for my slumbers had been short and fitful, and my waking found me as wearied and worn.

as though I had been deprived of sleep for a week. It came upon me, however, that I had a commission to execute that day ; something important to myself as life or health. I rose, dressed myself, descended to the parlour, and having partaken of a light breakfast, left the house. I walked rapidly, looking neither right nor left ; I gained the High Street, turned to the left, and presently halted before the post office. I entered. A man was sorting some letters in a corner ; a young, florid-faced man, with an impudent eye, came to the counter.

‘ Is there a letter here addressed to Martha James ? ’ I enquired rather falteringly.

He turned to a desk : raised a small bundle of letters ; ran his eye over them, extracted one, and returned again to the counter.

‘ Are you Martha James ? ’ he asked.

‘ Yes.’

‘ Hardly believe it,’ he said ; ‘ that’s an old woman’s name.’

‘ You may believe it or not, as you desire,’ I exclaimed, flushing an angry red ; ‘ but if that



letter is addressed to Martha James you will have the goodness to give it me at once.'

He threw the letter at me, and turning to his companion, exclaimed,

'Here's a hard-boiled egg for a soft digestion, Joe;' a piece of humour which produced a peal of laughter. I hastened from the office, too eager to read the letter to remain long angry at the fellow's rudeness. In the street I tore open the envelope I had myself addressed, extracted a thin enclosure, and read as follows :

'Post Office, Lichendale.

'To MRS. MARTHA JAMES,—Yours to hand. Heath Cottage is advertised for sale. The furniture was disposed of a month ago. I know nothing of Mr. Graham's whereabouts.

'Yours, &c.,

'JAMES HARLOW.'

Too vague and brief for my curiosity thirsting for abundant information, and yet decidedly better than no information at all. So the old

cottage was to be let—and the old furniture was sold! The past rushed in on me and flooded my soul. Once more that little parlour with its dim furniture, its old bookcase, its little window looking out upon the gaunt sweep of hill and livid landscape of moor, arose before memory's eye. I saw my father, I marked his benignant face, his cheery eye, his robust form; I heard his hearty laugh; I felt his tender kisses. He vanished and John Graham arose; a shape morose, sardonic, savage; madness was in his eye, murder in his mien. Where was he now? Had that hard iron soul of his been penetrated with a sense of his crime? had guilt left his conscience nerveless, had fear given him wings, had he flown from the scene of his enormous crime and hidden himself in some distant country?

I mused deeply on him as a murderer, as I walked to my lodgings. I know not why it should have been, but hitherto when memory had recalled him, she had not stamped him very forcibly with the association of his crime.

She represented him rather as the brutal husband, the fierce man, the lawless spirit. Enveloped in the sombre garment of my experience, crime seemed powerless to add a deeper hue. But now this deed of his stood out before me in naked demoniac outline. It seemed to absorb him all, as before it had been absorbed by his dark pitiless nature. He was the murderer now: chiefly, perhaps wholly, in my eyes. I could think of him as nothing else. Had justice scented his blood-stained tracks? had he been suspected? was he being watched? was he being pursued?

Oh, I would have parted with my right hand to have had the panorama of his life since I had seen him unrolled before me, that I might follow him in his actions, know whither he had fled, what he was now doing, whether we were ever again to meet. He had promised to hound me down—to haunt me like a shadow or a spirit. Had a guilty terror frightened him off my pursuit; or was he still active in his chase after me? I might have wished him dead;

nay, I did wish him dead For the sake of this beautiful world, for the sake of the men and women in it, the tenderest heart would have joyed to hear that such a man was no more. Think then of *my* justification for such a wish! Though oceans might roll between us, the invisible but indestructible chain forged by marriage must ever connect us. Whilst he lived, I was his: that was God's decree as interpreted by Society. My fate indeed seemed worse than that of the living wretch chained waist to waist to the mouldering corpse of a fellow-felon. It was a captivity to make this world a dungeon; it was a horrible wedlock of life and death to give existence a weird unreality, to make spectres of living shapes of men and women, to canopy the heavens with a livid curtain of cloud, to blot beauty from the face of visible things with the putrescent breath of blight; and leave me the solitary occupant with brain crazed by incessant weeping, to madden in a world to which I was fastened by the steely girdle of a vow I was not permitted to recant.

And yet my selfishness—for this I will call the feeling—would not suffer me to wish him captured. I knew the penalty of his arraignment; I knew the expiation his judges would impose. Should he die, the world might yet bloom anew for me: the dark curtain be withdrawn from the sky, and the soft glories of the heavens look down upon me with their soothing, nurturing light. But as the wife of a Murderer . . . .

Well, the horror passed; the storm wrought in my mind by thought, burst, flamed, died; the air cleared; feeling grew serene, the heart still. By the time I had reached my lodging the necessity of the present had put the possibilities of the future to flight; reason was steadily contemplating the actual; and of my recent fierce emotions no signs remained but a certain tremulousness of hand, a certain dull throbbing of the brow.

I rang the bell. Mrs. Shaw appeared. I requested her to bring me a sheet of paper, pen, and ink. These being set before me, I began

to write. I soon paused, however, looking up perplexedly at Mrs. Shaw.

‘Have you ever seen a school-circular?’

‘No, miss; is that what you’re goin’ to write?’

‘Yes; but I don’t know what to say.’

‘Nothin’ can be easier, it seems to me. Just tell ’em that you’re thinkin’ of startin’ a school. Name yer terms. Let ’em know what larnin’ yer mean to give ’em, and write your name and address at the bottom.’

Her plain sense gave me the idea. My pen scraped upon the paper; she remained, watching me with great interest. I read her the sentences as I finished them.

‘Will this do for a beginning? “Miss Kate Howard, having had some experience as a governess, proposes to form a class for young children whose parents wish them to be grounded in the rudiments of a sound English education.”’

‘That reads pretty well,’ she said, nodding her head. ‘It sets your mind afore them, and ’ll make ’em interested to know what’s comin’ after.’

‘Do you think it is intelligible? Can you talk of the rudiments of a sound education?’

‘I don’t know about that,’ she answered; ‘but if a thing reads well, it’s very much taken on trust. That’s what Shaw used to say when he got hold of them there historical tales as they’re called. Just read it again, will you?’

I did so, eyeing her as a child eyes a schoolmistress. She shook her head wisely.

‘I wouldn’t say “some” experience. Can’t you put in a bigger word than “some”?’

‘I can’t say “great” or “considerable” experience.’

‘I would though. There’s no use in doin’ things by halves. Take some of them actors as visits these parts. They all call themselves “Mr. Jackson, the great tragedy man,” or “Mr. Snooks, the great comedy man,” or “Mr. Mounseer, the great dancer from Paris.” Bless you! if they didn’t call themselves great nobody else would; an’ it’s just that little word afore their names as brings folks to see ’em.’

‘Well then, I’ll put in “great,”’ I said ; and in the word went.

‘Now read it from the beginning again,’ said she.

I repeated the sentence : by this time I had it by heart.

‘That sounds summat like. There’s naught like a flourish i’ this world. It’s what a crest is to a manufactory ; or a futman to a doctor ; or a large dryin’ ground to a laundress as has nothin’ to wash.’

Just then a knock fell on the door. Mrs. Shaw left the room, and in her absence I commenced another sentence.

‘Is Miss Howard in?’ demanded a familiar voice.

I started ; my fingers tightened on the pen ; the blood rushed to my cheeks.

‘Dr. Monck, miss,’ said Mrs. Shaw.

He hardly gave her time to announce him ; but pushing past her, advanced to greet me with outstretched hand.

‘So you have left the Fairborns?’



‘Yes,’ I answered.

‘For good?’

‘For good.’

‘I am delighted to hear it. May I sit down?’

‘Certainly. Take that armchair.’

He fell back into it. I resumed the chair I had drawn to the table. His eye ran over the room; presently it lighted on the piece of paper.

‘How long may I stop before you will get tired of me, and wish me miles away feeling pulses and mollycoddling old women?’

‘I am never likely to get tired of you, and you may remain here just as long as you please. Indeed, I am very glad to see you, Dr. Monck,’ I added with warmth; ‘for I am wretchedly dull and awfully lonely.’

‘What are you writing there? a letter summoning me to you?’

‘No. It is a circular, or rather an attempt at a circular, which I have a notion of sending among the gentry here.’

‘What! have you been inventing a new medicine?’ he asked demurely.

‘I am thinking of starting a little day-school.’

‘I understand. You are going to turn village schoolmistress; habit yourself in a new kirtle, dwindle your face by a large straw bonnet, wear pattens, wield a large umbrella, and use big words of six feet where small words of one will do. What’s to be the sign you mean to wear over your door? a birch: ay! that’ll be it:

‘And all in sight doth rise a birchen tree,  
Which Learning near her little dome did stow;  
Whilom a twig of small regard to see,  
Tho’ now so wide its waving branches flow  
And work the simple vassals mickle woe.

There’s an *à propos* motto for your circular. I should put that in if I were you.’

‘Dr. Monck, it is not fair in you to sport with my misfortunes. Necessity is a horse that makes its rider cut queer capers. If I am made to cut an absurd figure, have at least the taste to conceal your sneers.’

‘I am not sneering, Miss Howard. If I am laughing, it is because I am looking forward to the pleasure of giving Necessity such a crack with your birch as will send the bony nag bounding out of sight.’

‘But it will carry me with it.’

‘No! you shall have dismounted before the blow is given. But tell me now, what is the cause of this abrupt departure from the Fairborns?’

‘Have you not heard?’

‘I have heard nothing. I went last evening to see Bessie. Meeting that very colourless subject, Mrs. Fairborn, I observed that she was looking ill. Her face was bloodless as a turnip. Dark lines beneath her eyes, languid lids, and white lips told me of sleeplessness, worry, and, I thought, pain. I questioned her; she answered, she had been a little upset by your abrupt departure. That was all. You may judge my surprise to hear that you had left. I should have come to you at once, to appease my curiosity by enquiry: but I feared my haste

might resemble impertinence ; so I resolved to defer the visit till to-day. Here, then, I am.'

'The story is a curious one,' I said, with hesitation. 'I hardly knew how to tell it.'

'I think I can guess a portion of the plot. The finger of the devil was in the pie, eh? Mr. Fairborn forgot himself?'

'Quite forgot himself. Here is the outline; your imagination must supply the details. Mr. Fairborn, not being a married man, wanted me to elope with him.'

He fixed a blank gaze of incredulity upon me.

'Not a married man!' he ejaculated.

'No. Gumbles was my first informant in Mr. Fairborn's presence. Mr. Fairborn afterwards confirmed the footman's statement; and both their statements were finally corroborated by Mrs. Fairborn herself, in a scene so tragical that were it transferred exactly as it happened to the stage, it would probably be hissed as a sensational caricature.'

'That scene then accounts for Mrs. Fairborn's haggard appearance?'

‘No doubt.’

He glanced at me with open eyes.

‘Would you have believed this had you not heard and seen it?’

‘I certainly should not.’

He mused, swaying his right foot and glancing from me to the sheet of paper on the table with an almost comical air of perplexed amazement.

‘To think,’ he burst out, ‘that you should have been subject to all this! a little cooing dove among hawks! a bleating pretty lamb among wolves! Had you no presentiment of the catastrophe that drove you away?’

‘It is not likely, or I should hardly have awaited it. I certainly had noticed for a long time a certain vulgar familiarity of manner in Mr. Fairborn’s conduct towards me; it was difficult for me to resent, however; it was implied more than expressed. Besides, I thought him entitled to some degree of licence in his behaviour towards his dependent. Understand me; I mean that from a vulgar person like Mr.

Fairborn I could hardly expect the same respectful treatment he would bestow on ladies who did not eat his bread.'

His steel-gray eye was incensed ; a stern expression gathered on his face. He remained silent whilst I witnessed a conflict going on in his mind between his temper and his will. His will triumphed ; his face cleared ere long, and he addressed me.

' We'll think of it no more. If I suffer my mind to dwell upon it, it will magnify this hypocritical buffoon's conduct into an insult that must be chastised. For this, in my present position, it would be difficult, perhaps, to find an excuse ; which to be sure would render a horsewhipping only the more necessary. Well, you are out of it. You are not likely to meet him again. Let it go.'

He seemed to dismiss it with a wave of his hand.

I turned to the piece of paper, which I raised.

' Dr. Monck, will you do me a favour ?'

' What is it ?'

‘ Will you first help me to write this circular, and when it is printed, will you distribute a few of them among your friends? I will leave it to your good nature to urge my claims; and if you can procure me one or two pupils you will be doing me a favour which I shall find it hard to thank you enough for.’

‘ Are you serious in your project of starting this school? ’

‘ I am indeed. What alternative have I? It was by the barest chance that I procured the situation at the Abbey; and though, should a chance occur again, which I dare not hope, unless it happened soon I am not in a position to wait for it.’

The slight warm flush heralding tears was in my cheek.

‘ You made me promise,’ I added, ‘ that I would apply to you if ever I stood in need of your assistance; you see I do so without compromise or hesitation.’

‘ You want me to help you in procuring pupils? ’

‘If you will.’

‘I won’t.’

He looked defiantly at me and repeated, ‘I won’t.’

‘Very well,’ I said.

‘Are you weary of life?’ he asked.

‘Very nearly,’ I answered with an involuntary sigh.

‘Then ask me to write you a prescription, Miss Howard; I will give you something that shall kill you easily and outright. Don’t slowly break your heart by attempting to start a school.’

‘Then what am I to do?’ I cried, looking up at him despairingly. ‘Can I become a shop-girl, a servant, seek work at a farm-house? Don’t damp my hopes; don’t chill me into a despondency that will leave me without will enough in my heart to stir my naturally faint energies. The project I have hit upon is feasible. I am sure that if I could procure two or three children to teach I could go on very well; more would follow, and I might, by care,



enable myself to lay by enough to keep me secure from that frightful poverty which is to me a thousand times more dreadful than death.'

'Listen, Miss Howard ; if by raising my finger so, I could fill this room with girls ready for you to teach, I would not raise it.'

I said nothing.

'If,' he went on, 'I had Aladdin's lamp, which by rubbing it, would enable me to build you a mansion, fill it with the daughters of the aristocracy, place at your command the services of the most eminent professors in Great Britain, and achieve for your school the distinction of being the most celebrated seminary for young ladies in the United Kingdom, I would not rub it.'

I slightly raised my shoulders.

'You made me a promise in the woods, Miss Howard. Do you remember it?'

'I remember it and have fulfilled it.'

'You have fulfilled it in the spirit, but not in the letter. I presented a formula; will you repeat it?'

‘I will. “Dr. Monck, I am wretched.”’

“Miss Howard, if you will leave yourself in my hands I will pledge myself to procure you a position which shall render you happy.” Was that my reply?’

‘It was.’

‘Well, I am come to redeem my pledge. It is sweet to me as music, Kate, to hear you say to me “I am wretched.” My whole being thrills to those words. Repeat them, Kate.’

I did so, not blushing at the mention of my name, but growing faint in the embrace of a wild joy that rushed upon me—but a joy barbed with pain, an ecstasy whose extreme touched agony.

‘Kate, they make me feel as a fond generous-hearted child feels when some little red-footed bird, sad-eyed with fatigue, rigid with the cold, flutters to his feet; it is grievous to think so sweet a thing should suffer; but he cherishes it in his bosom; it nestles there, it revives; the soft, downy thing stirs to the solacing warmth. I met you, Kate, lying cold on the bare earth

away from your mates, friendless among cold-fronted strangers. I raised you ; it was sweet to me to minister to so fair a thing. There and then, Kate, I could have wished you to creep into my bosom, to draw from it that warmth of love which your dove-like eyes hungered for. But though I imprisoned your image in my heart, I caged you with wanton thoughtlessness among birds of prey. Fluttering little thing ! you moped and perched apart. That nipping atmosphere stagnated your blood ; in that uncongenial sphere your wings drooped, your spirits sank. I watched you. Love grew quick and strong to each glance ; but I waited, I would not tell you my secret. I said, "This cage in which the dove is prisoned will by and by grow unendurable ; the dove will flutter forth ; it will be mateless and hopeless ; it will think of me and turn to me. Sweet will be its flight to my heart ; sweet its nestling in my breast ; sweet its soft coo of contentment and the lighted love of its beautiful eyes." But though thus resolved I could not wait ; I thought of my

dove in her loneliness and in her sorrow. So I came to her.'

Whilst he spoke I listened. Soft were his tones, entrancing his words. What I heard I knew was visionary: vague as the music heard in a dream, vague as the pallid phantom of cloud that faints upon the blue. Yet I must hearken to him, as the thirsty Arab gazes at the cool fountains of the mirage, knowing the while that they will vanish at his approach.

He leant forward in his chair, clasped his hands upon his knee, and fixed his eyes on mine.

'I have come to redeem my pledge, Kate; I have come to offer you a position which it shall be my business to make a joyous one; I have come to ask you to be my wife.'

I returned his gaze now with something of a stony stare in my eyes. A shudder ran through my limbs.

'Speak to me,' he exclaimed plaintively, taking my hand and nursing it against his bosom; 'let that puzzling look go out of your

eyes, that I may see you love me. I would like to see it better than to hear it.'

My hand lay passive and cold in his. A feeling, an emotion, had temporarily mastered me, fierce and formidable in its brief access as the numbing grasp of Hysteria which turns the vitals cold, gives unreality to all things, and fills the brain with the delirium of madness. I could only shake my head ; I could not speak.

He let fall my hand : a look of unutterable sorrow saddened his face.

'I see how it is,' he said ; 'you do not love me.'

'I do love you,' I exclaimed passionately, voice and feeling returning to me with the relinquishment of my hand.

His eyes grew bright with the illumination of joy.

'Kiss me then, and say that you will marry me.'

'I will kiss you ; but I will not say that I will marry you.'

'Kiss me, darling ; the promise will follow.'

He put up his face ; our lips met ; he threw his arms around my neck and pressed me to him, keeping our lips, the one hot and eager, the other pale and passive, tight together.

‘ Now you will promise,’ he cried, taking my cheeks between his hands and searching my eyes.

‘ I cannot promise.’

‘ Then you do not love me,’ he said, half turning away.

I looked despairingly at him. Should I tell him the truth ? Should I obey that voice urging me to reveal my past, to lay bare my life ?

No ! No ! I could not do it. It would drive him from me ; the only star that shone in my bleak life would be extinguished. Oh, I could not bear his going away from me for ever, now that he had told me he loved me.

‘ I do love you,’ I exclaimed. ‘ I love you with a deeper passion than you love me ; for I love you for much that is not to be found in me—for your nobleness of mind, for your

loyalty to truth, for your generosity, for the tender gracious way in which you cared for the poor stranger. My heart has exalted you ; it has endowed you with every quality I could worship in a man. *That* is a proof of my love. Do not doubt me—do not doubt me !’

‘And yet you will not marry me?’

He gazed at me with eyes full of enquiry, love, admiration ; he grasped me by my hand, he drew me to him.

‘You will say you will marry me now?’

Passive and shuddering, I could make no reply.

He kissed my brow.

‘Now!’ he cried.

With a great effort I sprang from his embrace and confronted him.

‘You know that I love you,’ I said. ‘Be satisfied with my love. I cannot marry you.’

He could not comprehend me.

‘Why will you not marry me?’

I was silent.

‘Are you afraid of Diana Lepell? I swear

to you, Kate, that she is no more to me than the leaf I crunch beneath my heel. What her feelings are towards me I neither know nor care to know ; my feelings towards her are absolute indifference, tinged by contempt for a woman that can force a semblance of affection on a man who has never returned it by so much as a breath.'

I still held my peace, watching him. .

'Do you fear my mother? you have no cause. She cannot be your mistress—mine she is not. I am master in my house, and my wife—you, shall reign there first and supreme. A sense of what is due to her wishes has restrained any violent outspokenness. Whilst I did not love, her plans, her hopes, her desires, her schemes for my future never troubled me. I love now ; I will take you to my home ; my mother must be your friend or she will have to seek another asylum. The power to do what you will, will be yours ; for my property being entailed leaves you, as my wife, free to act as you wish.'



Resolution was forsaking me. My mind, radically weak, vacillating, inconsistent, swayed from side to side ; but its leaning soon grew apparent to me ; passion, admiration, the desire to have him for myself ; my poverty, my hopelessness, my blank present and my grim future—against their weight of what avail were reason, principle, nay honour itself, in the scale ?

He paused, awaiting some reply from me. Finding none vouchsafed, an expression of mingled disappointment and anger entered his face, giving rather pain than hardness to its lines.

‘I understand,’ he commenced abruptly ; ‘you love some one else. Love has been the cause of your flight from home. The curse of disappointment has wrought ; your affection has been betrayed ; suffering has driven you away from the scene of your hopelessness.’

I violently shook my head, too overcome to speak.

‘That experience has hardened your heart,’ he went on coldly. ‘The flame still burns, but

you have imprisoned it in a marble cell. What you think to be your love for me is nothing but friendship, distant, tempered affection, if you like; gratitude great enough to make you think it more. Of anything warmer you are incapable. I ought to have known it. Fair women, they say, never do love. I believe it.'

'It is false!' I cried. 'They do love—love with greater intensity and with greater purity than those hot-blooded brunettes, those passionate, boneless, black-eyed shapes who have emotions enough for twenty lovers at a time. I love. Will you not believe me?'

'If you refuse to marry me, how can I believe you? Why should I believe you?'

I looked at him. A wild emotion seized, swayed, subdued me; I ran to him, took his hand, kissed it, and was about to tell him I would be his wife—when my tongue became powerless, my heart seemed to cease its throbs; I stood rigid as a statue, with my eyes on his, my meaning frozen on my features.

He gazed at me almost wonderingly : then the fire leapt in his eye, his face grew radiant.

‘Do not speak!’ he exclaimed. ‘The poem in your face is your confession. Kate—darling—wife, come to me!’

He extended his arms.

I recoiled ; I passed my hand over my eyes to cleanse them of the dimness that had settled upon them.

Deeming me coy, he rose and took me in his arms.

‘I have you now,’ he said in a tone of exultation ; ‘my sweet little woman, my sunny-haired bride !’

In his warm embrace the resolution that had checked my utterance grew pale and attenuated, like wax before flame. One great effort it made before it was dissolved.

‘Give me time,’ I murmured rather than spoke, for my breath came and went with difficult pantings and I feared that I should swoon. ‘Let me take thought—all this is so hurried—you are impatient——’

‘True love is always impatient,’ he said, cherishing and caressing me.

‘Your kisses take my breath away—they have robbed me of the power of thinking—to-morrow—come to-morrow—I shall have had time to think by then. I shall have grown calm.’

Perhaps the pallor on my face warned him to forbear from exciting me further; perhaps he believed that his declaration had been precipitate, and that it was only just I should be allowed to collect my thoughts, scattered and confused by his passionate appeal. He unwound his arms, led me to a chair, and whispered,

‘So be it, Kate; I will be here to-morrow—early, mind. At your peril let your answer be faltering. Every moment till then will be the sorest trial my patience has ever undergone. Now God bless you!’

He grasped and pressed my hand, and left the room.

## CHAPTER X.

OUR love-scene had been a long one. It took longer to act than it takes to read. The door had no sooner closed upon Dr. Monck than Mrs. Shaw entered with my dinner. Whether or not she had overheard any portion of our conversation, I cannot say; I fancied that she glanced with a certain good-natured slyness at me as she set the tray on the table. She did not speak; something like the sense of the impertinence of speech at that moment might have been conveyed by my still mien, my pale face. With instincts most unusual in a garrulous woman she appreciated my implied wish for solitude, and having discharged her mission slipped quietly out.

I took my seat mechanically at the table,

turned the well-browned chop many times over with my fork, and knowing no more of what I was about than had I been acting in my sleep, commenced to chip out little bits and swallow them.

The sunlight streamed into the room through the broad bay window ; the little apartment was made noisy, busy, impertinent by the glare. It formed no scene to inspire or encourage meditation ; and so my lonely repast being concluded, I retired to my bedroom. Here I should be quiet. The room was cool and white. Through the window I could see the tall trees in their yellowing mantle of green, and beyond them the open country sweeping and swelling in verdant billows to the horizon.

It needed no effort of mine to set my mind thinking. It plunged me at once into a reverie, profound, difficult, perturbed.

Before me lay two roads. At the extremity of one Love had lighted a beacon that streamed out with a broad mellow light, irradiating the path with a shine of silver splendour and crystal

clearness. Flowers strewed the way ; a perfumed breeze intoxicated me with a subtle joy. At my side walked Love ; pointing to his beacon, and speaking to me in soft melodious tones of the radiant realms that lay beyond. Peace floated over me and fanned me with her shining wings. Hope waved her star-crested wand, and flashed life and beauty into my eyes ; and voices about me spoke of soft joys, of tender dreams, of vermillioned visions realisable by pursuing the road I looked on.

‘Love will be yours and all the sweet endearing joys of Love. Hunger, and Want, and gaunt Despair will be for ever banished from your life ; your slumbers will be sound and smiling, unharassed by grim dreams, shadowless with unhallowed presences. Your waking hours will be a feast and a revelry. Oh, follow, follow !’

Such was the burden of the hymn these voices chanted.

No light illuminated the extremity of the other road ; it stretched before me a dark, dreary

way ; weird shapes walked or crouched upon it ; Melancholy in her sombre mantle ; Poverty, with his bloodless face and shivering form ; Hunger, with his ravening eyes and shining fangs ; Dependence, with her servile mien and sinister smile. Honour stood beside me with averted face and drooping lids and downcast air ; she had no heart to urge me to take that mournful road. Dead leaves instead of flowers strewed the way ; no auroral light tinged the horizon with a promise of beauty and gladness, when I should have gained the end. Hollow voices grimly sung a dirge :

‘ Each step you take will bear you deeper into darkness. Dead hopes, dead dreams, dead passions, will strew your wake with skeletons. Your life will fade in the gloom ; your beauty pale ; your heart will drip blood—for memory will have seized it in its sharp fangs, and there will be no hope to pour balm. And at the extremity of this road your grave lies ready dug ; Poverty and Melancholy will be your pallbearers ; the sombre shapes that crouch before



you will swell your procession ; and Obscurity shall heap your memorial mound of clay ! ’

I know, now, that these pictures were crude, rough, exaggerated.

From the picture of Love I should have dashed out many tints, blotted many flowers, sobered all the lights, harshened all the graces. To the picture of Despair I should have imparted the radiance of Faith, given Honour a stauncher mien, more valorous eyes ; have found room for Hope and place for Opportunity.

Perhaps I had not the capacity, perhaps not the resolution, to examine life in its reality. Imagination had painted me these perspectives ; I accepted them as actual representations. With the alternative, then, before me, you may guess to which path my inclination pointed.

At this distance of time I do not find it easy to recall the great struggle that went on in my mind. The recollection of the general features of my reverie is with me ; but the details—the spears and sabre wounds—the steely agony

points—I do not remember. Two prominent troubles stood out : two giants amid the hosts that fought within me. The first was the dread of John Graham ; the second, the wrong I should be doing Dr. Monck in not telling him of my marriage. Yet I knew the penalty of candour ; I dreaded it with an anguish that stirred the flesh on my bones. He would leave me. One kiss he might vouchsafe me—love's requiem over a dead offspring ; one tear-dimmed glance he might give ; one lingering, torturing pressure of the hand, and then he would go.

A withered, lifeless, vacant form,  
He'd lie on my abandoned breast ;  
And mock the heart which yet is warm  
With cold and silent rest.

This, and this only, should be the consequence of my revelation : as the wife of a living man I could not be his. Honour, Morality, Religion, would prohibit our ever seeing each other again.

On the other hand, should he ever discover my secret after I had become his wife, his

whole nature might grow changed under the shock. His love would crumble ; his confidence would vanish ; his affection would be a thing of the past ; something dead, lying with an icy weight on his heart, and breaking him down with the grief that would be brought by the discovery that the woman whom he had trusted and loved so well should have wronged him so.

For was he not trusting me ? He knew nothing of my past, he knew nothing of the secret that had driven me from my home. Had his heart contained one element of suspicion he must have dwelt with persistency of enquiry on the reason of my flight, and appealed to me as a lover to tell him my story. How many men are there who would not have done this ? The typical lover, I know, would have regarded the enquiry as an act of justice to himself as well as to me. He would have reflected upon the position to which he was about to raise me by marriage ; and ere he reared his idol and set her up before the world he would have examined well the pedestal ; he

would have made sure that before the eyes of society were fixed upon the image, the fabric would not fall and crown his life and mine with humiliation and the sharp thorns of misery and remorse.

Reader, may it never be your fate to under go the sufferings I endured that afternoon. Love, which soothes others, which gilds and decorates and gladdens, tormented, saddened me and wrung my heart. Him whom I loved so well I should be deeply injuring by loving ; yet from him whom I loved so well I could not tear myself.

The afternoon passed, the evening shadows fell ; they found me still in my room, a poor pale weeping child gazing with mute stony eyes at the shapes of Love and Despair that each held his chalice to her lips, the one rudely menacing, the other softly inviting her to drink.

Mrs. Shaw at last came to disturb me. Into the cause of my suffering she had too much delicacy to enquire ; but she told me I was

foolish 'to sit all alone acryin' my eyes out, as if sorrow was to be melted by tears! Come, she had summat to show me in the parlour.' I got up and followed her; upon the table I saw spread a variety of delicacies, bottles of wine, and a large glorious bouquet which filled the room with a smell like a flower-garden.

'When did these things come?' I asked.

'Just now,' she answered. 'There's a letter for you that come in them flowers.'

She took a little note from the mantelpiece and handed it to me. I read :

'MY DARLING KATE,—You see how candid I am in my address. But you must know that one of the privileges of a husband is to call his wife by what names he chooses; and after I have looked at your soft eyes and thought a little, I shall find some sweet poetic title which I mean to crown you with and know you by.

'The bearer of this missive is no little apple-faced boy with wings and a bow and arrow, but a substantial Huddleston youth, who ought

to arrive at your door with a basket. When I left you you were looking a little too pale to please. So, madam, at your peril you will hesitate to order Mrs. Landlady to uncork one of the bottles and fill you two bumpers, one for yourself, the other for me. I am a medical man, understand, and know what is good for pallid-faced girls with dreamy eyes. Until to-morrow morning, adieu.

‘FRANK.’

Meanwhile, as if guessing the contents of the letter, Mrs. Shaw had been busy twisting a corkscrew into one of the bottles; she had also prepared herself with a wine-glass. The cork was drawn, she filled the glass and handed it to me.

‘Drink that, miss,’ said she; ‘it’s Mrs. Trundle’s receipt agin agitated spirits. Only she drinks beer, which is tasty enough when one’s thirsty, but ain’t at all the thing as a cordial.’

I took the proffered glass, emptied it; then

poured out another, which I gave to her. The rich wine warmed and cheered me at once. It seemed to stir life at its sources; it brightened my eyes and steadied my hand.

I can give you one piece of advice from which it is possible you might profit if you can profit from nothing else in this book. If you want to get rid of an elderly woman garrulously disposed, on no account give her a glass of wine. Whether she enjoys the feeling of holding a brimming glass or not, who knows? but you will observe that a most weary interval elapses between her first sip and her last. It acts too as a signal for her to open the sluice-gates of her eloquence and let forth the mighty current of her understanding. She dives deep, hauls up experience after experience by the hair and suspends it dangling. Mrs. Shaw soon commenced; she opened her mouth and out popped the inevitable Mrs. Trundle of whose name I was as sick as I am afraid you must be.

‘When you was in your bedroom,’ she began, twirling the wine-glass round by its bottom

with the magical dexterity of finger which enables some old women to raise a saucer brimming with scalding tea to their mouths on three finger-nails, 'Mrs. Trundle was with me. I've bin avengin' of you.'

'Have you?' I said, sinking in a chair.

'Yes,' she answered, 'I have.' It's fortunate Mrs. Trundle ain't a woman likely to be knock'd down by surprises. She can stand a good deal o' uncommon news, she can, without growin' pale. But I did think when I told her o' them Fairborns that she'd never cease a openin' of her eyes and mouth. "Mrs. Shaw," says she, a shakin' her head "you're jokin'." Says I, "Mrs. Trundle, look here, may I never be able to pass that there door if it ain't the solemnest truth." "Well," says she, "to be sure! and yet do yer know, Mrs. Shaw," she says, "this ain't the first time that I've heerd whisperins of indecency muttered agin them people." That's the worst of Mrs. Trundle; she'll never let yer enjoy havin' a bit of gossip to tell. She's allers heerd summat like it afore.'



‘I suppose she’ll go and gossip it all over Huddleston?’

‘Leave her alone for that. Lor bless you, she’ll be doin’ nothin’ but give tea-parties for the next fortnight jest that she may tell folks what she’s heerd. Not that she need invite ’em to listen. Gossip’s a sarce as people ’ll swallow without meat to gi’t a relish. “It’s a very odd thing,” says Mrs. Trundle, “that I should allers ha’ distrusted them Fairborns. It may be wicked o’ me to say it, an’ I a mother with a growed up son as needs a many cautions yet to keep him to his work, though to be sure he’s the smartest constable i’ Huddleston, but there! I never could respeck a man as held a plate at a church door. I don’t mean to say he’s worse nor other folk as comes fishin’ round the pews wi’ little bags at th’ end o’ long sticks. That ere principle I never did admire o’ puttin’ folks to shame to get their money. Though every eye might be upon me from t’ Saints’ i’ th’ coloured windys to the Clerk as groans Amin! as much as to say Thank God, that’s done wi’!

I never could be put to shame for givin' nothin' when I don't mean to give." That's good sense, Miss Howard,' said Mrs. Shaw admiringly.

'Very good sense,' I answered.

"I'll tell you what happened to me once," says Mrs. Trundle to me, a followin' her ideas o' the Fairborns. "You know farmer Bundle's fields?" "Yes," I says. "Well, passin' there you gets to a lane as leads to Mr. Smalley's factories." I nodded. "Well, one evenin' I'd been to th' overseer's house to take a clean shirt as he wanted 'tickularly afore Saturday, an' as I was returnin' home, just where the barred gate is as stans frontin' t' orchard, I hears a step comin' arter me. I says nothin' but walks on. Presently I hears a 'Psh! hilloh, there!' I turns, sees a man, and grows overcome with fear. I says nothin' but walks on. You see I'm a corpulent woman, Mrs. Shaw," says she, "and can't run, or I'd ha' takin' to my heels. You know my little straw bonnet wi' t' lilac trimmin'? I wore that and my brown shawl. My hands was empty. And so, as I say, I

says nothin' but walks on. 'Psh!' says he behind me. You know what tight stays is when your bosom's fit to bust wi' want o' breath? Well, that's how I felt. I prayed for Jim, but that were no use. 'Psh!' says he, followin' me close. 'A fine evenin','he says; 'are you takin' a lonely walk?' 'You'll please pass on an' leave me,' says I, fit to faint. 'Won't you let me walk with you?' he says. At this I stops and says in my dignified way, though I felt the pins and needles all over me, an' could hardly speak wi' chokin'; 'I'm a respectable woman,' I says, 'and if you're a man, which you oughter be, for there's enough on yer to make two, you'll jest pass on.' At this we sees each other's faces. I don't know whether he likes mine or not, but he no sooner sees it than off he walks. Who do you think he was? why Mr. Fairborn as sings so loud i' church and houlds t' plate. 'Why, you wicked old man,' I cries, walkin' arter him; 'I've a good mind to call a constable and give you in charge.' At this he walks on pretty quick. 'I'm a followin'

you,' I cries; 'you might ha' given me apoplexy wi' the fright, you good for nothin' man! I'm a comin', and if all the town sha'n't hear o' this ——' Here he breaks into a run; and bein' corpulent, as I says, and not bein' able to follow, he gets off. Could I ha' run I'd never ha' lost sight on him till I'd put him in jail for assault. When I gets home I takes to fannin' myself for an hour, and drinkin' mild gin and water for fear I'd tumble down and not be able to get up again." And that's Mr. Fairborn,' said Mrs. Shaw.

I beg you will not think that I believed this story; but Mrs. Shaw's manner of telling it amused me much. The good effects of her conversation manifesting themselves in my face, she continued her narrative, telling me various stories of the people of Huddleston, borrowed, I presume, from her friend, at some of which I laughed outright. Thus passed the time: I found no leisure for thinking until I was in bed.

The morning came, an eventful morning for

me. It dawned and grew ominously in a broad shadow of rainless cloud and a high warm wind that swept the leaves from the trees. I left my bed and adjourned to the parlour. Though some of the delicacies provided by Dr. Monck were set before me in tempting array, I could taste nothing. And yet I was not agitated. The storm of the preceding day seemed to have cleared my mind, leaving my feelings calm, my thoughts steady. Nay, something even like a subtle light streaming from the pale flame of love in my heart irradiated and warmed me. Before I had fallen to sleep I had formed my resolution; and waking, I had found reason powerless to disturb it.

The breakfast things had hardly been removed before I heard his knock. The door opened and he entered.

No embarrassment was in his air, no hesitation in his address. But love lighted his eye, hope tinged his cheek, happiness wreathed his mouth. Handsome, and fresh and manly he looked; a true type of the English gentleman,

with his delicate white hands, his broad chest, his polished, graceful, unaffected air. He came towards me and said,

‘If your answer be yes, Kate, kiss me. That shall be your token, simple, sweet, and eloquent beyond words. If no—tell me to leave you. I will go.’

His hopeful smile belied his words. He feared no disappointment.

I looked at him; his eyes earnestly watched me: he had clasped his hands, and stood motionless. He had not to wait long; I went forward, threw my arms around his neck, and pressed my lips to his.

He took me in his arms: for a long time we stood in this embrace, neither speaking; I trembling, but passive in the possession of the joy to whose delirium I had yielded myself.

‘Mine,’ he exclaimed at last, taking my hand and raising it, ‘until death do part us.’

‘And mine,’ I answered, fondly looking up at him with shining eyes and clinging to him still, ‘in death as in life.’

He led me to a chair, not relinquishing my hand, and seated himself beside me. He could not take his eyes from my face. Full of deep admiration, full of thirsty love, they seemed to drink in my features. With his other hand he caressed my hair, my cheeks, my brow, like one who fondles a bird.

‘Our love has grown quickly, has it not, Kate? When you came to Huddleston did you think to find a husband?’

I shook my head.

‘And yet when I saw you,’ he went on, ‘I knew that I had found a wife. When you met me at Mrs. Gregory’s I was glad you did not look at me, otherwise you would have thought my stare rude. But admiration is always rude. Such beauty as yours, Kate, is a kind of intoxication that steals away the brains through the eyes.’

‘I am afraid you have fallen in love with me only for what you are pleased to call my beauty,’ I said.

‘And suppose I were to answer yes? Do

you know I am a believer in beauty? It is a spirit I do not question: I take its virtues on trust, for such beauty as pleases one I am sure never betrays one's confidence. I have no doubt that there are a few respectable young and middle-aged men in this world who, when they ask a girl to marry them, really and truly have only her mind in view, and care not whether she be pitted an inch deep with small-pox, whether she has one or two eyes, whether one leg is longer than the other. Their taste is like Isaac's in the "Duenna":

'Let her locks be the reddest that ever were seen,  
And her eyes may be e'en any colour but green;  
For in eyes, though so various the lustre and hue,  
I swear I've no choice—only let her have two.  
'Tis true I'd dispense with a throne on her back,  
And white teeth, I own, are genteeler than black;  
A little round chin too's a beauty I've heard,  
But I only desire she mayn't have a beard!

Haven't I a good memory? But the majority of men who have not sharp little Isaac's cant, regard beauty as a higher quality in a woman than the finest mental trait—when they view



her matrimonially. For it they will accept only the substitute of money or title.'

'Then if I had no beauty, you would not love me?'

'That is not a fair question. If a pearl were an oyster shell it would not be prized. When once you get to ifs, there is no end to possibilities. If you were not yourself, which without your beauty you would hardly be, I suppose I should not love you.'

'But I shall become an old woman if I live ; my beauty will decay ; still I shall be myself.'

'Must I answer you seriously?' he replied, toying with my hand. 'It is hard : imagination is powerless to represent those eyes as bleared, that pure skin wrinkled, that rosebud of a mouth a mere gap, sans teeth. There are two kinds of love, I take it : the strong personal love, such as we now feel, Kate ; and the love of association. The one makes people marry ; the other keeps them together. But, darling, we must discuss other things more important than this. I want to talk to you of my mother.'

‘Let go my hand then, Dr. Monck ; you will eat it, and I shall have to wear my wedding-ring on my right finger.’

‘I won’t worry it then, only I must have it ; it belongs to me ; I have a right to my own. By the way, my name is not Dr. Monck ; I was christened Frank, not Doctor.’

‘I will call you Frank.’

‘Pronounce it then. Say “Frank, darling.”’

‘Frank, darling.’

‘Those words fit your lips, they become honey-dewed. Kate, what wonderful eyes you have ! In them I see myself represented a poor shrivelled Liliputian. Is that the image of me they convey to your heart ?’

‘If I had your knack at complimenting, Frank’ (the word fell easily and freely from my lips), ‘now would be my time to rival you. But you were speaking of your mother.’

‘Yes,’ he exclaimed, growing serious. ‘All last night I lay awake thinking how I should act. I would like to introduce you to her, darling ; if I wished to act rightly to you, I

know I should do so. But she is a stubborn woman, stern and unbending, easily incensed, and appeased with difficulty. She has set her heart upon my marrying Miss Lepell. It is an old and hackneyed topic between us; and only last evening she began reproaching me for my coolness, pointing out that dark woman's charms, insisting upon the commercial value of the match, if I would not permit that hard lumpish view of the question to be leavened by a little sentiment.

“Mother,” I said, “I do not care for Miss Lepell. In my eyes she is charmless. If she would bring to me the dowry of an Indian princess, or could arm me with the wonderful lamp of Aladdin, I should look upon Diana Lepell as a statue of flesh and blood, without a quality to attract, and with a number of characteristics to repel. She is haughty, she is supercilious, she is conceited. My indifference towards her must have expressed my sentiments in a dialect which she can hardly have failed to interpret; still she forces herself on my

regard, and proclaims herself by doing so a woman of such little real delicacy, that, on my honour, if I had the choice between her and some polite lady's maid richly dowered by an eccentric old mistress, I hardly know, whether, on the whole, I would not of the two rather marry the lady's maid." You can believe my outspokenness stirred my mother. To have introduced your name at that time would have been sheer madness. She was sulky for the rest of the evening, and I left her sulky this morning.'

'It is not imperative that I should meet her, is it, Frank?'

I had begun to think of her as a sort of Gorgon who would petrify me the moment our eyes met.


'Certainly not,' he answered. 'I am determined not to risk your happiness. And (I speak it with bated breath as becomes the emotion of reverence) I fear she is only too likely to melt my little girl into tears and make her very wretched should she meet her in her

present position. My idea is to marry you without telling her anything of my marriage. When we are once united I will then take an opportunity to inform her of the step. She may storm—let her. Her lightning is not likely to dissolve the link that connects us : her thunder will roll harmlessly over our secure heads. When she finds that she is without remedy she will cool ; she can sulk indeed ; but her character is too fiery to allow her to sulk long. She is a woman of sense ; and if I give her time, she will allow her objections to reconcile themselves with our marriage. *Quand on emprunte on ne choisit pas.* I will then introduce you. Your fascination will prevail. She will learn to love you and to commend my choice. Does my little girl approve my scheme ?

‘My darling,’ I answered, ‘I am yours now, to do with as you please. You have only to beckon—your little girl will follow : nay, to look—she will comprehend the summons.’

This speech earned me a shower of kisses.

‘I am right. I am right!’ he muttered.



‘This is no common jewel. She comes to me, this bird ; she nestles to me ; she wants warmth ; I will cherish her.’

‘She will repay you,’ I whispered.

‘Those eyes have the power, those lips the honey, those cheeks the fragrance to sweeten life,’ he went on dreamily, gazing at me with a look of rapt devotion. ‘No mutinous light will ever harshen those serene orbs ; no heartless pride will disfigure that serene mouth ; no growing weariness of love darken that radiant brow.’

‘You are comparing me with Miss Lepell?’

‘Compare the violet with the sunflower—compare an Abyssinian beauty with the Venus of Milo. How can I compare you ? No—I am thinking on the soft suggestiveness of your face—drawing its inspiration to my heart, and glorifying myself for my discovery. It is pleasant to wander in the vague delicious vision, Kate, that you are making me dream. In this stony world it is pleasant to leave the glaring high-way and repose awhile in some leafy breezy

nook, echoing with madrigals from the boughs,  
melodious with the murmur of rippling water,  
fragrant with freshness of secret flowers ; and  
thus

‘ forget

What those among the leaves had never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan.

Such an asylum, such a dainty refuge, will  
your presence be to me, pet.’

I kissed his hand and stroked his hair with  
such toying caresses as love dictates when  
dreaming in its deepest mood of peace.

‘ Kate,’ he asked, ‘ when will you marry me ? ’

I hung my head.

‘ Will this day week be too soon ? ’

‘ I will marry you when you wish,’ I  
whispered.

‘ Be it so. We will fix on next Wednesday.  
Our marriage must be secret—unfortunately it  
will have to be at Huddleston. Luckily I have  
a friend, the curate of All Saints’, on whose  
secrecy I can rely. I saved his child’s life in a  
severe attack of scarlet fever ; he will be glad

to repay the obligation. I will arrange with him—procure the license—and take care that nobody but himself and the clerk shall know anything of it, until I choose to make it public.’

He released my hand, and drew forth a pocket-book.

‘You will have a busy time before you, sweet,’ he said, producing a small square of folded paper; ‘for I have several commissions for you to execute. You must go and make what purchases you may think necessary in the way of dress. Set the shop-people to work, Kate, as hard as ever they can stitch. Order everything to be sent here; for here you will remain until I can take you to your home.’

He dropped the paper in my lap, and rose.

‘I must remain no longer with you; my patients will be getting noisy, and I shall be brought up for manslaughter. Good-bye, darling.’

He took me in his arms, and fondled me; but he could not tear himself away from me for a long time.



‘Push the dressmakers on, my little bird ; shrill with your silver clarion at them, or they won’t be ready for us,’ were his words on quitting the room.

When he had gone, I opened the little paper packet on my lap, and found it to consist of a number of Bank of England notes. I counted them—there were five, and each one for ten pounds.

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